

# REMEMBERING TOMORROW

ཡེ་ཤུག་ཤིང་།

by

ཀུ་རུ་ཕུ་ཤུ་ལ་ས་

Gu ru 'phrin las



# REMEMBERING TOMORROW

ཡེ་ཤུག་ལྷོ་མ་

by

གུ་རུ་ཕའི་ལས་

Gu ru 'phrin las





# REMEMBERING TOMORROW



ཀུ་རུ་ཕའི་རིན་ལས་

Gu ru 'phrin las



ACCLAIM

Richly contextualized and in succinct, fluent English, Gu ru 'phrin las is intimately familiar but also removed from the world he describes. His stories are more than personal childhood reminiscences for they are collective memories of the many Tibetans with a herding background who grew up in a black yak-hair tent (including me) but who now rarely see such a tent in their homeland. While the stories illustrate a life that might be described as unsophisticated and impoverished, dotted with moments of sincere compassion, they do not avoid the complex brutality and revengeful emotions that are also an integral part of this life.

Antagonistic values and tangled emotions are displayed mirror-like, one reflecting the other. A little girl admires children who had changed their grass-insoles during Lo sar 'Tibetan New Year', but these same children admire her for being allowed to sleep as long as she wants. A boy's understanding and interpretation of his brother, "the crazy monk," is more profound than his father's. Eight yaks paid for the death of a poor family's son is compared to eighty yaks in compensation for the revenge death of a rich family's son.

These stories challenge the reader in a multitude of ways. Are they memories or imaginings, fictional creations or lived realities, remnants of the past or tomorrow's authenticities?

Rig grol རིག་གྲོ།

*Victoria University, Australia*

Gu ru 'phrin las, a local Tibetan, created a life for himself beyond his home herding community on the Tibet Plateau, and when he was granted an opportunity to study in a major Chinese city. It is within this physical remove from his birthplace that he recounts stories based on memories of community life and relationships that a time-traveler would find little changed from a thousand years ago. Grandparents, parents, children, boys, girls, monks, customs, patterns of thought, and beliefs are revealed, reflecting a social existence in sharp contrast with what many might consider "ideal community life."

These stories are a testimony to fundamental social transformations in the last few decades - changes that continue today at an exponential rate as the old is dismantled and replaced by the novel. With this in mind, engaging these narratives is a revelatory deciphering of embedded core

values and an informed interrogation of tradition.

Dpal ldan bkra shis དཔལ་ལྷན་བཀྲ་ཤིས།  
*Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*

Gu ru 'phrin las echoes his grandmother's voice in nineteen short stories, vividly narrating unadulterated Plateau life in a Tibetan herding community. While the grassland is fragrant flowers and colorful rainbows of aching beauty, it is also harsh winter snowstorms and their lethal consequences. Yak-hair tents, herding livestock, hunting wildlife, compassion and sin, challenges confronting women, moving between summer and winter pastures, young men's rivalry and bloody conflicts over girls, bandits and livestock theft, complex mental turmoil, and much more are featured. Why is it taboo for a guest to visit a family with an infant at night? Why should women not butcher animals? Why do herders kill lambs during blizzards? This pool of accounts is a rich ethnographic resource characterizing herding lives and is a must read for those interested in Plateau lives.

Kelsang Norbu (Gesang Nuobu,  
Skal bzang nor bu སྐལ་བཟང་ནོར་བུ།)

These nineteen, well-written narratives developed from the life experiences of a Tibetan elder, transport the reader into the actual lives of Tibetans inhabiting a remote pastoral area of A mdo. Told under the mantle of "fiction," Gu ru 'phrin las enriches our understanding of Tibetan pastoralists' lives, spirituality, livestock, and rangeland based on true life experiences.

Tshe dpal rdo rje ཚེ་དཔལ་རྡོ་རྗེ།  
*University of Canterbury*

What do children in herding areas do on the first day of Lo sar 'Tibetan New Year' for good luck? What is the social status of women in Tibetan herding communities? What choices does a woman have if her fiancé has an affair with her mother? How do religious beliefs conflict with real life? How do young women deal with the conflict between arranged marriage and their desires? How do people seek justice within traditional social structures? Read *Remembering Tomorrow* for answers to these and

other questions.

Duo Dala (Stobs stag lha ལྷོ་བས་སྟག་ལྷ།)

*International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam*

This extraordinary collection of nineteen thoughtfully written stories reflects various aspects of a traditional herding society before being swept away by the speedy waves of modernity. The stories not only open a window for curious outsiders eager to glimpse the challenging herding way of life, but also serve an educational purpose, ensuring that future generations better understand people's cognitive perception of religion, animals, relationships, and methods of dealing with daily life dilemmas.

Li Jianfu 李建富 (Libu Lakhi,  
Zla ba bstan 'dzin ལྷ་བ་བསྟན་འཛིན།)

Gu ru' phrin las' *Remembering Tomorrow* is a short story collection profoundly capturing the very essence of the premodern, A mdo Tibetan nomad experience. Rich, thick descriptions allow readers to feel, smell, and visualize pastoral lifestyles as well as better understand the multiplicities of Tibetan character. This extraordinary achievement suggests the possibility of reinventing ourselves without forfeiting the dignity and meaning of an ever-fading past.

Rinchen Khar (Rin chen mkhar རིན་ཆེན་མཁའ་པལ།)

*University of Massachusetts, Amherst*

Gu ru 'phrin las' vivid short stories illuminate nomadic A mdo Tibetan life. Growing up in a herding family, the author portrays the local community's religious beliefs, taboos, family conflicts, marriage, and social norms. This book's critical descriptions of ordinary moments in herders' daily life complicate the stereotype and romanization of Tibetan pastoral life.

Sangs rgyas bkra shis སངས་རྒྱས་བཀྲ་ཤིས།

*Duke University*

...memorable tales of a past in a remote corner of the Tibet Plateau, highlighting mundane life's harsh realities, reflecting social norms, customs, beliefs, and the herding way of life. It is unusual for such a

young author to have experienced living in a yak-hair tent - a lifestyle that has nearly vanished. Such unique lived experiences enable Gu ru 'phrin las to grasp and depict his grandmother's stories vividly and persuasively. Each story opens a window, revealing a hidden actuality in often sentimentalized nomad life. These nineteen stories allow outsiders to experience harsh realities as they travel through romance and realities.

Gengqiu Gelai (Konchok Gelek,  
Dkon mchog dge legs དོན་མཚོན་དཔེ་ལེགས།) *University of Zurich*

Concise, quick, and vivid accounts of Tibetan nomad life from Golok in western China from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> to the early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Easy to read and quickly moving readers through chronicles depicting Golok's harsh climate, daily lives, pastoralism, relationships, conflicts, women, men, communal hierarchies, domestic violence, traditions, food, dating, arranged marriages, poverty, kids, bandits, and more. *Remembering Tomorrow* is also about remembering yesterday. These vanishing experiences of ordinary herders would not have been recorded, valued, told, and retold without the intelligence and thoughtfulness of this young Tibetan writer.

Nyangchakja  
(Snying lcags rgyal སྟིང་ལཱགས་རྒྱལ།)



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FRONT COVER: Mount De'u dkar དེུ་དྭ་དྭ་, Sog ru སོག་རུ། (Suohurima 索呼日麻) Township, Gcig sgril གཅིག་སྒྲིལ། (Jiuzhi 久治) County, Mgo log མགོ་ལོག་ (Guoluo 果洛) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (2017, Gu ru 'phrin las), Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, China

BACK COVER: Gu ru 'phrin las (2018, Xi'an 西安 City, unidentified photographer).

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## *ASIAN HIGHLANDS PERSPECTIVES*

*Asian Highlands Perspectives* (AHP) is a trans-disciplinary journal focusing on the Tibetan Plateau and surrounding regions, including the Southeast Asian Massif, Himalayan Massif, the Extended Eastern Himalayas, the Mongolian Plateau, and other contiguous areas. Cross-regional commonalities in history, culture, language, and socio-political context invite investigations of an interdisciplinary nature not served by current academic forums. *AHP* contributes to the regional research agendas of Sinologists, Tibetologists, Mongolists, and South and Southeast Asianists, while also forwarding theoretical discourse on grounded theory, interdisciplinary studies, and collaborative scholarship.

*AHP* publishes occasional monographs and essay collections both in hardcopy (ISSN 1835-7741) and online (ISSN 1925-6329). The online version is an open-access source, freely available at <https://bit.ly/2ABONy3>. The print edition is available to libraries and individuals at-cost through POD publisher [Lulu.com](https://lulu.com) at <https://goo.gl/rIT9II>. The journal currently has a core editorial team of three members and a consultative editorial board of experts from a variety of disciplines. All submissions to the journal are peer-reviewed by the editorial board and independent, anonymous assessors.

*AHP* welcomes submissions from a wide range of scholars interested in the area. Given the dearth of current knowledge on this culturally complex area, we encourage submissions that contain descriptive accounts of local realities - especially by authors from communities in the Asian Highlands - as well as theory-oriented articles. We publish items of irregular format - long articles, short mono-graphs, photo essays, fiction, auto-ethnography, etc. Authors receive a PDF version of their published work. Potential contributors are encouraged to consult previous issues.

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# NOTES

## THE STORIES

I wrote the stories in English. Several were published in *AHP* 53 'Contemporary Tibetan Short Stories' and re-edited for this volume.

## TERMS

The terms explained below appear in the story:

*'dre mo* - a female ghost

*bla ma* (lama) - a high-ranking, know-ledgeable religious person.  
"Teacher" is a more general translation.

The Eight Auspicious Symbols refer to the parasol, golden fish, right-turning white conch, the lotus, victory banner, treasure vase, the Dharma wheel, and the eternal knot. The parasol represents protection from suffering; two golden fish symbolize that living beings practicing the Dharma should not fear drowning in the ocean of suffering and can freely choose their rebirth like fish in water; a right-turning white conch represents the sound of the Dharma wakening beings from ignorance; the lotus represents the true nature of beings rising through samsara into enlightenment's beauty and clarity; the victory banner signifies victory over passion, fear of death, pride, and lust - the victory of wisdom over ignorance; the treasure vase is always full and represents the teachings of the Buddha and also suggests long life and prosperity; the Dharma wheel represents the teachings of Buddha and particularly the Eight-Fold Path; and the eternal knot signifies the mutual dependence of religious doctrine and secular life, and wisdom and

compassion.<sup>1</sup>

*rtsam pa* barley that is roasted and ground into flour. It is often placed in a bowl, and milk tea, butter, dried cheese, and sugar are added, according to taste.

Six Sacred Syllables - a Buddhist mantra consisting of six letters, hence the "Six Sacred Syllables"

stick out their tongue - locals from my home community stick out their tongue when they feel shy or embarrassed


## THE PHOTOGRAPHS

I took all the photographs in this book except for three or four taken by my relatives. The photos were taken in my homeland and edited online at <https://bit.ly/2XsihYX>.

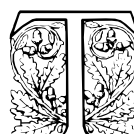
<sup>1</sup> <https://bit.ly/2r1DRoM>, accessed 4 April 2019.

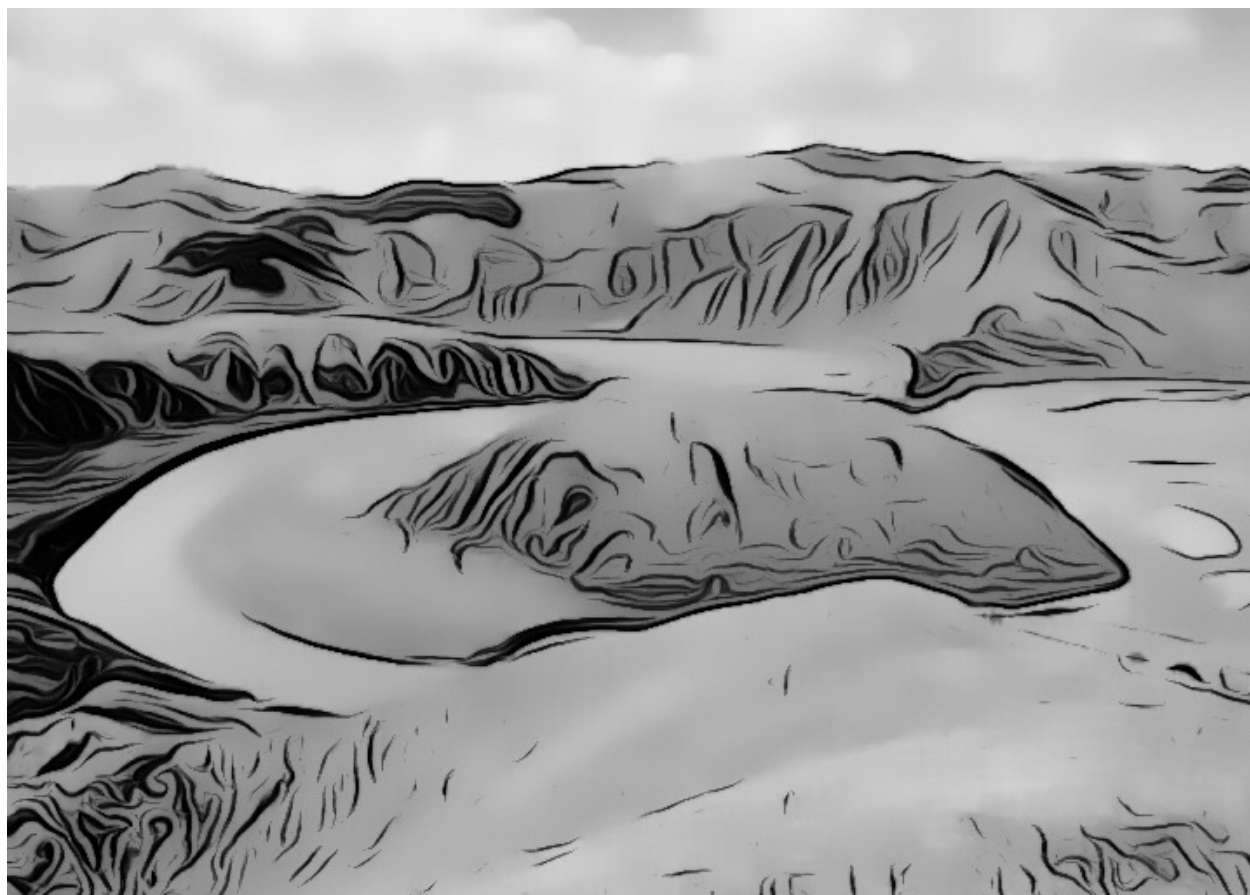


# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

hese stories exist because of my paternal grandmother, who transmitted to me her vivid memories of the past - what she had seen, experienced, and believed. These memories are now part of me. I thank my parents for their continuous support. I also thank Sarge, CK Stuart, and *AHP* friends and editors for their helpful comments.

# INTRODUCTION

he climate is harsh, at an elevation of about 4,000 meters in my native grassland - Smin thang (Mentang) Township, Gcig sgril (Jiuzhi) County, Mgo log (Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, China. It was here that I was born in a black yak-hair tent near the Rma chu 'Yellow River' at the foot of a high mountain in my family's summer camp. My paternal grandmother helped Mother to give birth.



My family consists of my parents, three sisters, an elder brother, and me. My parents and elder sisters are herders. My brother is a government

clerk and works in the local township government. My younger sister works as an accountant in Pan ma (Banma) County in Mgo log Prefecture.

My mother and sisters rose early to add frozen yak dung to the yak enclo-sure. This keeps the yaks warm and protects them from bandits. The dried yak dung is then later used for fuel.

My family had four neighbors - my father's sister's family and my father's cousin's family and her two daughters' families.

When I was a child, my family had around a hundred yaks, fifty sheep, and ten horses. My father herded the sheep and horses while my mother herded our yaks until my oldest sister was old enough to assume this duty. Meanwhile, my grandmother, a tall, beautiful woman, tended my four siblings and me.

My family has winter and summer pastures. When I was a child, we moved seasonally between the two, living in black yak-hair tents until 1997 when my family built a one-story packed-earth house in the winter pasture. The roof was made using several long poles placed across the top of the walls and covered with boards. A layer of thick plastic covered with shrubs was put atop the boards, followed by a layer of soil. The house had a living room, shrine room, and a storeroom for food, clothes, and other articles. All my family members slept in the living room on cushions placed on the wooden floor, except for Grandmother, who slept in the storeroom on a wooden bed.

My grandmother, my siblings, and I lived in the house from the eleventh to fifth lunar months. My parents did not spend much time at our house, though they wanted to. They had no real choice. Our family's economic mainstay was our livestock, so they camped and moved with the livestock, ensuring that they had forage.

This arrangement continued for ten years until Father hired Tibetans from Sichuan Province to build a stone house of three rooms on the same site as the first house.

Butter lamps were our light at night until 1997 when my family bought a solar panel electricity generating system. At that time, children had few toys, and there was no TV to watch, so I asked Grandmother to tell me stories when I was bored. Sometimes I sat on her lap as she sat near the

door of my family's house door, basking in the sunshine. She often wore a sheepskin robe without a shirt and told me about the earth - which was flat and bounded by a limitless ocean. This was beyond my ability to comprehend since I could only envision my family's summer and winter pastures surrounded by high mountains.

Elders' stories help me appreciate their lives, and through that window, the differences between their lives and mine come into focus, helping me to understand myself better.

The years with my grandmother, my main caregiver, remain the most memorable time of my life. She was a great storyteller and told me stories whenever I asked, including folktales, and stories about her own life. I was mesmerized, although my great interest was partly due to a lack of television and radio.

Grandmother was fond of *rtsam pa* so that's what we often ate, along with milk tea. We also ate fried bread that had been prepared for Lo sar 'Tibetan New Year' and had not been consumed during the festival period. Besides *rtsam pa*, mainstays were boiled mutton and beef. Grandmother also boiled yak and sheep bones in a big pot for hours. We mixed the resulting oil with *rtsam pa*, which was one of Grandmother's favorite dishes. We seldom cooked noodles and baked bread.

I wore sheepskin robes Father and his cousin made, and leather boots that Grandmother and mother crafted, which we rubbed with oil or butter to soften.

When Father was about eight-years-old, he attended a local tent-school and learned basic math and how to read and write Tibetan. Required to herd, he was unable to study for very long. He was my first teacher. After supper, by the light of a smoky, flickering butter lamp, he taught Tibetan to my brother and me and how to count from one to a hundred. We used a dirty, torn elementary Tibetan book. Father dictated what he taught, and my brother and I used sticks and wrote what we learned in the ash-covered hearth. We had no mathematics book. Father wrote numbers on the ground, which we copied.

Father knows no Chinese.

When I was eight, I began learning Chinese when I enrolled in a local primary school. I started to study English in middle school and also

studied English in high school for one year.

My brother and I herded my family's calves from the sixth to the eighth lunar months until we returned to school. At that time, Mother gave us two balls of *rtsam pa* and a military canteen filled with boiled milk. We swam in a branch of the Yellow River on hot days, keeping one eye on the calves to ensure they didn't find their mothers and leave them with no milk. Among the grassland flowers, we ate our *rtsam pa*, which remains the most delicious food I've ever had.

Grandmother basked near our home in the sunshine, often wearing a sheep- skin robe with no shirt. She said the earth was flat and bounded by a limitless ocean. This was beyond my ability to imagine since I could only envision my family's summer and winter pastures surrounded by high mountains.

In September, we were responsible for our horses. We did not need to pay much attention during the day, but we had to cross several high mountains and drive them home in the evening.

My grandmother profoundly impacted my personality and my interests. I continue to enjoy visiting elders, spending time with them, and listening to the accounts they give of their lives. I prefer this to watching films at home and reading. Elders' stories help me appreciate their lives, and through that window, the differences between their lives and mine come into focus, helping me to understand myself better. The stories in this collection are their lives.

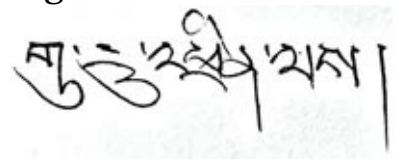
Now is the time to write such narratives before I forget or remember them dimly. I was born at the right time and place to experience traditional life in the company of lifelong herders. The universe of my childhood was little different from my elders' childhoods, empowering me to comprehend better and interpret memories of their world. My children and grandchildren may want to know about my parents' and my grandparents' lives. This collection provides a portal through which to understand the past better.

A broad abyss separates the childhood I spent with my grandmother on an unfathomable flat earth surrounded by an endless ocean, and the life that opened for me when I began attending the local boarding primary school. I want to explore that difference in future writing.

Many changes have come to my home area since 2010. Locals now have permanent houses and live in fabric tents in summer. Black yak-hair tents are gone. Every household now owns a TV and motorcycle. Richer families have cars. Families no longer pack their belongings on yaks in moves between pastures. Most people use phones; consequently, there is much less visiting. The Tibetan New Year period and weddings are one of the few times locals gather and chat. Many families have sold their livestock and moved to the township town to operate small shops and restaurants. The former sense of a tightly bound community is weakening.

Ordinary and marginalized people interest me, partly because I am from an ordinary family and because, as a Tibetan herder, I am familiar with marginalization. This explains my interest in Skyabs chen bde grol's (b. 1977) works that reveal the conflicted life of ordinary pastoral people while giving the reader space to complete the stories.

I spent the years before attending the local primary boarding school with my grandmother. There is a huge gap between life in school and the part of my childhood in which an endless ocean surrounded a flat earth. I want to explore that very broad abyss in future writing.

A handwritten signature in Tibetan script, likely the author's name, written in black ink on a light background.

# THE STORIES



# 1

## YOU ARE MY MOTHER'S MOTHER

### Characters

A mchod a lo	a monk
Bkra g.yang	Gangs lha's friend
Bkra kho	Bsod tshe's brother
Bkra shis g.yang 'dzoms	Bkra shis rnam dkar's friend
Bkra shis rnam dkar	Lha mo's grandson
Bkra skyid	Lha mo's herd-mate
Bsod tshe	a community leader
Byang chub	Bkra kho's son
Dpal 'dzoms	Lha mo's mother
Dbang phyug	a singer
G.yang mo	G.yang mo
Gangs lha	Lha 'dzoms' friend
Gangs mdzes	Gangs skyabs' mother
Gangs skyabs	Gangs mdzes' son
Lha 'dzoms	Gangs lha's friend
Lha mo	Bkra shis rnam dkar's grandmother
Tshe grangs	Lha mo's lover

Tshe tshe

Lha mo's only child; Bkra shis  
rnam dkar's mother

A breeze blew gently one summer morning under dull sunlight. Grandmother Lha mo seemed displeased with the weather. Her face had as many wrinkles and crevices as a piece of tightly crumpled paper that had been unwadded and laid out flat. Sitting near her family tent flap, she began her story as usual, picking up her chipped tea bowl decorated with the Eight Auspicious Symbols with the fingers of her dirt-encrusted right hand and scraping away a few bits of dried, dark *rtsam pa* stuck to the bowl. Occasionally pausing to sip some milk tea, Lha mo normally exuded enthusiasm when storytelling to her grandson, Bkra shis rnam dkar. He enjoyed her stories as much as she enjoyed telling them, but today was different. Grandmother had tears in her eyes as she talked.

Bkra shis rnam dkar was so involved in the story that he didn't even blink until his grandmother stopped, two lines of tears wetting her cheeks. She piously tapped her prayer wheel against her forehead before putting it, wrapped in a red cloth, on her lap.

Bkra shis rnam dkar was etching a yak on the lap of his grandmother's sheepskin robe. Its surface had been rubbed with butter many times and was thus a perfect drawing surface. A mischievous, obstinate, six-year-old, he sometimes sucked and licked mucus from his nose when he was angry with his mother.

Grandmother Lha mo adjusted the upper part of the sheepskin robe on her left shoulder and again touched the prayer wheel to her forehead piously as she slowly closed her eyes. She placed the prayer wheel in her robe pouch and paused. Great sadness was written on her face, testifying to the more than seventy years of life she had experienced. Bkra shis rnam dkar scratched at a louse in his short, messy hair and curiously stared at his grandmother's face, eager to know what would happen next. He impatiently demanded, "Grandmother, who was the '*dre mo*? Why did people believe she was a witch?"

"You'll be frightened if I tell you the truth," Grandmother replied gently.

...

The Dga' lung Tribe camped near the Yellow River. It was a wonderful

place in summer, and the locals found great pleasure in the beautiful scenery. Herders enjoyed singing and listening to melodious herding songs, while also delighting in the lovely sound of lambs bleating as they leaped over small glistening creeks, frolicking here and there, excited by brief sprinkles of rain. On the emerald grassland decorated with fragrant flowers, young herders chased the end of a rainbow to one side of the Yellow River. The other bank was a densely forested hill.

Every drizzly evening, locals also enjoyed the many birds that sang while perched on the green, vigorously leafing branches.



...

Winter was, however, another story of another world. No one said Dga' lung was a perfect winter home. Feelings of desolation and loneliness were intensified by whirlwinds that periodically swept dust from yak enclosures, coloring the horizon red.

On a day that was both auspicious and destined for tragedy, Lha mo rose earlier than her mother, Dpal 'dzoms, and milked all the yaks. Her mother loved her and never scolded her. Lha mo held a wooden milk bucket with her right hand and walked to her family's tent as briskly as the heavy bucket allowed. She was happy.

After kindling a fire in the adobe stove, she wiped her sweaty, unwashed forehead with her robe sleeve. Next, she poured hot water from an old kettle into a cracked red basin and added a dash of cold water.

Her mother started to get up as Lha mo was tidying her hair.

"Today must be auspicious since you are up so early!" she greeted.

"Dear Mother, you forgot! Today, my herdmate, Bkra skyid, will marry!" Lha mo exclaimed.

Dpal 'dzoms yawned, paused, and offered, "Yes! You should join her wedding."

"I promised I would join her wedding party when we herded calves together. Look! The tea is boiling. Let's have breakfast now," Lha mo suggested.

Dpal 'dzoms yawned in response.

"Dear Mother, please get up. I must leave soon after breakfast. Bkra skyid will be delighted if I'm the first guest who arrives at her wedding," Lha mo gently persuaded.

"OK. I'll get up right now," Dpal 'dzoms agreed but stayed in bed a while longer before kicking away the robes that served as her bed covers, one by one.

Dpal 'dzoms took a wooden box from a pile of supplies and gear after the meal. The box was white, but it was wrapped in a dry yak-skin with black hair attached. Dpal 'dzoms unwrapped a coarse, yak-hair rope from around the box. The rope secured the box lid, preventing mice from getting inside. Lha mo stood next to her mother, eager for something inside. She snatched a black robe from the box before her mother had completely removed the lid, raced outside, jerked off the robe she had on, and pulled on the black robe. Of her three robes, this was her favorite and her only unpatched piece of clothing. She wore it when she attended parties.

Clad in the robe, she stood near her family tent's flap, put her right hand to her forehead, and inspected the sky with sparkling, inquisitive eyes. Eager to learn what the weather would be, sunshine lit up her cheeks, so that they resembled coral.

Lha mo never asked her mother to buy ornaments for her. The black robe satisfied her.

As Dpal 'dzoms drove her family's twenty yaks to the mountains, Lha mo mounted a riding yak and set off, soon catching sight of her peers who

were waiting for her. She sped up when they shouted at her. They loved her because of her beauty and compassion and never humiliated or denigrated her because of her poverty.

Lha 'dzoms, clad in a spotless white, sheepskin robe, urged, "Lha mo! Make your yak go faster, or we'll be too late and miss part of the wedding."

Gangs lha, clad in a robe trimmed with otter pelts, laughed loudly and said, "Hey everybody! Lha 'dzoms is in such a hurry. Maybe someone is waiting for her? Let's see her handsome boyfriend! How wonderful!"

"It's more interesting if we can see your boyfriend!" Bkra g.yang retorted, adjusting her fox skin hat.

"She'll surely become a nun. She has no boyfriend and will join a nunnery by the end of next year. Just look at her short hair! It's already cut in a nun's style," Lha 'dzoms pronounced, rearranging her shiny long hair, so it flowed between her generous breasts.

"Hey, dear friends! Do you prefer Lha 'dzoms' bald boyfriend or a round piece of *rtsam pa*? Her boyfriend was a monk for a year, so only Lha 'dzoms is willing to be his girlfriend," Bkra g.yang proclaimed authoritatively and laughed so loudly that she almost toppled off her horse.

Lha mo said little but enjoyed her friends' banter.

...

Dbang phyug was singing from the center of a huge, black yak-hair tent. A white *kha btags* hung from his right hand while he held a bowl brimming with yak milk in his left hand. Everyone enjoyed gazing at his attractive physique and listening to his pleasant voice. He was considered the most handsome young man in his community.

As Lha mo and her friends entered the tent, Lha mo nervously blushed, her cheeks turning as red as shiny autumn apples. It was the first time for many of the people there to see her. Everyone focused on Lha mo's arrival, ignoring Dbang phyug. Dressed in her black robe, Lha mo, the new center of attention, self-consciously put her head down and sat by Gangs lha near the tent entrance. Her nervousness meant she had forgotten to look for her boyfriend.

Dbang phyug plopped next to his close friend, Bkra shis, picked up a

bowl, and sipped a bit of milk tea. He set the bowl down and stroked his long black hair with his right hand. His silver finger-ring, inset with three red corals, trapped a few strands of hair. Lha mo watched as he pulled the hair from his ring. Noticing Lha mo was watching, he roughly jerked at his hair.

In his thick red sash, Bkra shis wore a long sword in a silver sheath decorated with coral. Dbang phyug's hand struck the hilt of Bkra shis' sword. Surprised by a jolt of pain, he scolded Bkra shis.

At sunset, as most guests started back to their homes, Bkra shis and his friends huddled near the bank of the Yellow River, talking about girls and night dating. Bkra shis ran to Dbang phyug and whispered in his ear. A second later, Dbang phyug angrily burst out, "Tell Gangs skyabs to come here and meet me now. Quickly!"

Bkra shis nodded agreement and respectfully exclaimed, "Yes!"

...

Dbang phyug and Gangs skyabs were standing among rocks by the river. Rage burned in Dbang phyug's heart as he accused, "How dare you date Lha mo. You're ugly! Do you think you can attract her by pretending to be a good person? Stupid! Don't you know beautiful girls like handsome guys like me?"

Gangs skyabs ignored this outburst. Enraged, Dbang phyug slapped Gang skyabs' face and threatened, "Do you understand? Lha mo is my lover and will be my wife. Don't dare meet her again or you'll lose your life. Understand?"

Gangs skyabs was furious but quietly endured the slap.

"Are you deaf?" Dbang phyug bellowed and slapped him again.

Gangs skyabs suddenly bent down, picked up a rock, and smashed it against Dbang phyug's head. Dbang phyug crumpled among the rocks, blood spurting from his head. He lay corpse-like as a tiny rivulet of blood flowed into the Yellow River, creating a red cloud that soon vanished into the larger stream.

...

Bkra kho sat cross-legged, wearing an angry expression. He and his



brother, the community leader, Bsod tshe, were having a private conversation near Bsod tshe's tent. Taking a deep breath, Bkra kho began, "My son, Dbang phyug, almost died last night from a head injury..."

Bsod tshe interrupted, "Don't worry Brother. I'll deal with it. We'll get a big settlement from Gangs skyabs' family."

Bkra kho blurted, "They're rich! Property means nothing to them. I want Gangs skyabs dead."

Bsod tshe looked at his brother's angry face and was silent for a bit before cautioning, "Bloody conflict will ensue if you take revenge. You know I'm the community leader. I'll take responsibility for this event. I'll handle it peacefully."

Bkra kho seemed to nod in agreement and added, "It's good if Tshe grags feels what it's like for his son to suffer serious injury."

Bsod tshe continued persuading Bkra kho, who finally agreed to wait for his report a few days later.

...

Tshe grags warmly greeted Bsod tshe in his family tent and seated him on a thick, smooth wool mat. A platter piled with steaming mutton was set in front of him. Bsod tshe and Tshe grags each took a piece of mutton and sipped milk tea. Bsod tshe began in a friendly way, "My dear sworn brother, don't worry about Bkra kho's son, Dbang phyug. It was a small injury. It's not serious."

Tshe grags knew that his friend's purpose was to reassure him, and reluctantly said, "OK, Brother."

"It's best for your son, Gangs skyabs, to apologize to Dbang phyug. Otherwise, we won't extinguish the fire of Bkra kho's anger."

"Is it appropriate for me to give some compensation?" Tshe grags asked.

"That's unnecessary. I told you, my sworn brother, that I saw Dbang phyug's wound, and it's just a scratch."

Tshe grags agreed as they moved on to chat about this and that.

...

Bkra kho's oldest son, Byang chub, was chanting scriptures near Dbang phyug, who lay sprawled on a bed with a bandaged head. Bkra kho entered the family tent and leaned his rifle against a bag of grain in the lower part of the tent. He took a couple of swallows of tea from a bowl and said nothing.

Some minutes later, Byang chub finished chanting and wrapped the scripture in a yellow cloth. He understood that Gangs skyabs never bullied others and urged his father not to take revenge.

Bkra kho knelt by his son and asked, "Dear son, how are you today?"

Dbang phyug stared vacantly, giving no response. Bkra kho thought he had spoken too quietly and loudly said, "My son, how are you today?"

Receiving no reply, Bkra kho took a deep breath and stood up. He realized his son's mind had vanished.

...

The next day, Bsod tshe again visited Tshe grags' tent, regret and shame etched on his face. He tried to say something to Tshe grags, but nothing comprehensible emerged from his mouth.

Tshe grags poured steaming milk tea into a bowl. Bsod tshe sipped it and eventually said, "I'm sorry. You should give ten yaks to Dbang phyug's family. He's now just like a corpse."

Tshe grags was stupefied, not because Dbang phyug was in a coma, but at the thought of losing ten yaks. He scratched his unkempt hair and said incredulously, "Ten yaks? Because of that fight over Lha mo?!"

...

Ten days later, Gangs skyabs heard that Lha mo's family had been exiled from the community. He refused to speak. His mother, Gangs mdzes, urged him to eat, but he refused.

Tshe grags glared at Gangs skyabs and scolded, "Shameless! Only a fool would be attracted to a poor girl. You know our family is wealthy. How shameful if you fell in love with a girl from a poor family."

"Father, why should Lha mo's family give ten yaks to Dbang phyug's family? Lha mo didn't hit Dbang phyug's head. I did. Our family should take responsibility for the yaks that Bkra kho requested. It's not fair for

Lha mo's family to lose ten yaks," Gangs skyabs entreated.

"Shut your dirty mouth!" Tshe grags bellowed.

"Father, have mercy on Lha mo's family. They only have twenty yaks!" Gangs skyabs pleaded.

"Her mother grabbed our community leader, Bsod tshe, by the hair as they argued over the ten yaks. Stupid! Witch! Who'll have mercy on Dpal 'dzoms? Do you understand what I'm saying? Just shut up!" Tshe grags declared.

...

Lha mo grudgingly helped her mother pack the family's few belongings. Understanding that the conniving community leader and the cruel Bkra kho were bullying her family, she sadly urged her mother not to move and not pay any yaks.

Dpal 'dzoms comforted, "Dear baby! Don't cry. We'll start a happy, peaceful life in your Aunt G.yang mo's community."

Distraught at leaving her friends and lover, Lha mo knelt near a bag of grain and sobbed.

...

Three years later, Lha mo seemed to be reconciled to living in the Ri lung Tribe with her mother. Nevertheless, she frequently recalled her happy moments with Gangs skyabs in the Dga' lung Tribe. Her pillow was often wet with tears, something her mother either ignored or did not know.

Noticing Lha mo's swollen cheeks, her mother urged her to eat more and curiously wondered why Lha mo hadn't fallen in love with any of the many men who pursued her. Even A mchod a lo's son, Thar 'bum, had pursued her.

...

Having finished his daily chanting A mchod a lo put his wooden bowl into his dirty, bedraggled monk-robe's pouch. After a moment's contemplation, he pulled a jacket over his robe. His wife knew he would visit the home of Tshe brtan, the richest family in their community.

Tshe brtan warmly welcomed A mchod a lo, who had chanted

scriptures for them after his wife had given birth to their three daughters. Tshe brtan's fourth child was a boy. Consequently, Tshe brtan treated A mchod a lo like a holy *bla ma* and was not bothered that he had a wife and children. All the local community members respected and followed A mchod a lo's suggestions.

...

One sunny morning Lha mo drove a calf to her tent and passed A mchod a lo, who was peeing near his tent. When he noticed Lha mo, he pretended he was doing nothing out of the ordinary and greeted, "Hey Lha mo, how's your mother?" in a friendly way.

"My mother is good," Lha mo murmured.

"Visit my home when you are free," A mchod a lo invited.

Lha mo blushed, feeling guilty that she had refused to listen to both her mother and A mchod a lo and had rejected A mchod a lo's son's offer of marriage.

...

Dpal 'dzoms and Lha mo tied all their yaks. Realizing that her family's sick calf was absent, Lha mo mounted her riding yak and headed into a narrow, forested valley. Her riding yak's moist, pink tongue hung out, almost touching the zigzag path. It was a dim evening, and dark clouds swirled above. Unable to see very far into the distance, she mooed like a mother yak. She went near a huge, dark cave and saw the missing calf dozing at the cave entrance. The calf woke in terror at the sound of Lha mo dismounting nearby and scampered into the cave. Lha mo followed and was astonished at seeing a fire. For a moment, she trembled in fear, unable to move. She eventually managed to back away but then stepped on someone's foot.

It was Gangs skyabs! Lha mo could not accept he was a human being until he touched her right cheek. Gangs skyabs' skin was rough and dark, but his handsome, attractive appearance remained.

"Lha mo! We must thank the Buddha for reuniting us. I will never leave you until I die. Lha mo! Maybe you think I'm mad. I left my family three years ago and became a hunter. I argued with my father after he

arranged a marriage for me. I swore I would never marry anyone but you. I got here a couple of days ago, but I never imagined we would meet so soon."

Lha mo silently lowered her head and dabbed at her tears. Gangs skyabs took her in his arms and wiped away her tears with his right hand.

Some days later, herders drove their yaks back home. Thar 'bum dismounted from his yak near his family's tent and entered to find his father chanting. He blurted, "I saw a ghost. A living ghost!"

"Where did you see a ghost?" A mchod a lo inquired.

"It entered a cave in Srib nag Valley," Thar 'bum answered, his face pale. "It was tall and wearing a large animal skin. Its hair was as long as a woman's. Maybe the ghost is a female. I didn't see its face."

A mchod a lo doubted this report and resumed chanting. The community, however, was frightened by Thar 'bum's report and the ghost was the only topic of discussion among local community members the next day.

G.yang mo was sixty and lived alone. She tied ten yaks and went to Dpal 'dzoms' home to ask Lha mo to help find her three missing yaks. Dpal 'dzoms was afraid the ghost would harm her daughter, but Lha mo persuaded her mother to allow her to go. She sincerely wanted to help Aunt G.yang mo, knowing no one else would.

On this very dark night, they searched everywhere they could imagine until they grew tired. G.yang mo suggested they return home and then suddenly tumbled to the ground. Her yak had bolted when a rabbit sprang in front of them. Lha mo quickly dismounted, tied her riding yak to a bush, and chased after and caught G.yang mo's yak.

"Are you OK, Aunt G.yang mo?" Lha mo worried.

"I'm fine. Don't worry. Where's my yak?" G.yang mo whispered hoarsely.

Lha mo patted G.yang mo's back until she breathed normally. She helped G.yang mo remount her yak, and they rode back home together.

The next morning, Lha mo got up earlier than usual and hurried to G.yang mo's tent. Lha mo worried when she found her aunt lying in bed with a pale, gaunt face. Not knowing what to do, she asked A mchod a lo for help. A mchod a lo chanted for the whole day and performed various rituals. Nevertheless, G.yang mo became increasingly ill and passed away that night.

...

A mchod a lo pondered possible explanations for G.yang mo's death. Suddenly, a smile lit up his dark face as he recalled the ghost story.

Locals believed evil had possessed G.yang mo, which explained her death. They also believed A mchod a lo's account of a ghost that was so violent and powerful that he could not defeat it. From that day on, locals began to have negative opinions of Lha mo.

Over time, Lha mo's robes became worn and in need of patching. Wearing her favorite black robe, she drove her family's few yaks to Srib nag Valley, passing by the community. Lha mo was no longer the famous beauty that attracted everyone's attention. On the contrary, some local girls avoided her as vicious rumors circulated. Some didn't even use her real name. A new name, Ma ne, became Lha mo's nickname. Rumor said evil possessed Lha mo, which explained why, at times, she was not in her tent when young men visited her at night.

Locals thought a ghost would possess them if they used her real name whereas using "Ma ne," which they believed symbolized the Six Sacred Syllables, would protect them from evil.

Gangs skyabs sat near a creek, plucked a red flower, and hesitantly offered it to Lha mo. She raised her head a little and took it.

Gangs skyabs blushed, wanting to speak, but nervously remained silent. Lha mo lowered her head again as she twisted and tore the red blossom into bits.

Eventually, Gangs skyabs haltingly said, "Lha mo, let's marry and live as we like."

Lha mo gazed at her swollen belly as tears drenched her strawberry-colored cheeks. She murmured something that Gangs skyabs did not understand.

"Why are you crying? There's no reason for despair. Do you no longer love me? Do you have another boyfriend?" Gangs skyabs inquired despondently.

"You are my only lover. I'm eager to marry you, but we can't change our destiny. I don't want both our lives to be miserable. You can have a happy life if you leave this hellish place. I want my lover to live somewhere as peaceful as paradise," Lha mo managed in a trembling voice.

"Lha mo, I prefer to live a tragic life with you rather than live in Heaven without you! Please! Marry me. We can create a happy life. Lha mo, I love you! My life is finished if you reject my sincere request!" Gangs skyabs declared, facing the sky.

"I am no longer Lha mo. No one in my community calls me that," she said, leaning against Gangs skyabs. "Locals say I am an evil witch," she added in a whisper.

"Oh, my Buddha! You are not a witch. You are Lha mo, my lover! You will be a kind-hearted mother soon," Gangs skyabs said, gazing at Lha mo's belly.

...

Lha mo's only child, Tshe tshe, was also Bkra shis rnam dkar's mother. She was eavesdropping, eager to learn more about her father. Unfortunately, Bkra shis rnam dkar suddenly interrupted his grandmother's story by standing up and declaring, "Gangs skyabs was right. You are Lha mo! You are not a witch. You are my mother's mother, Lha mo!" with great assurance. "You are not a witch! You are my mother's mother, right?" Bkra shis rnam dkar continued.

Grandmother Lha mo was astonished and did not answer, but a big smile on her face signaled that the rest of her life would be a bright departure from the past decades.

It rained the next morning. A steady drizzle refreshed all creation and energized the damp grassland that grew more vigorously, becoming even more vibrantly green. An aromatic breeze made the countless flowers sway, sending showers of pearly droplets of water earthward under the flowers.

Bkra shis rnam dkar and Bkra shis g.yang 'dzoms were naked and ran happily toward a small brook decorated with nameless flowers.

The grandmother put her left hand to her forehead as her right hand gripped her red prayer wheel. She smiled when she saw her grandson with his lovely playmate, Bkra shis g.yang 'dzoms.

## 2

# "I'M SUCH A HORRIBLE PERSON!"

### Characters

Lha mo

Tshe pe

Tshe ring bkra shis

Tshe skyid


Tshe ring bkra shis' cousin

Tshe ring bkra shis' friend

a young father, Tshe skyid's  
husband

a young mother, Tshe ring bkra  
shis' wife



he ring returned home after visiting the local monastery where a *bla ma* had bestowed the auspicious name, Tshe ring bkra shis, on his first child, pleasing Tshe ring and his wife, Tshe skyid.

From the day his son was born, Tshe ring chanted scriptures every morning and before going to bed, and often reminded his wife to light a butter lamp every night. After lighting the lamp, Tshe skyid piously put her palms together, touched her forehead, and prayed.

One morning, Tshe ring had a horrible fever. His fleshy cheeks were pale, and his lips were cracked. Tshe skyid suggested that she herd while he rested at home. While he knew that his illness would worsen if he herded, Tshe ring put great value on his family's reputation, which would be seriously damaged if a wife herded while her husband was at home. Consequently, Tshe ring mounted a red yak with one broken horn and got ready to take his yaks to the mountains.

The yak suddenly bolted. Tshe ring's foxskin hat fell to the ground, which he snatched up without dismounting. He stuffed it into his robe pouch and drove his family's yaks to the grassland.

When Tshe ring returned home with the livestock in the late evening, he noticed that his wife wore an expression of despair and reported that their three-month-old baby had cried for most of the day. He would sleep, but awake in terror a moment later.

Tshe ring motionlessly stared at his wife and gazed at his son, who was wrapped in soft lambskin, inside a sheepskin robe. He thought someone had frightened him and recalled that his cousin, Lha mo, had spent the previous night in his tent.

...

It was a pitch-black night when Lha mo found herself near Tshe ring's tent. She was very upset to have spent the whole day unsuccessfully searching for her missing yaks. Tired, hungry, and sure she could not safely arrive home that night, she decided to spend the night at the tent of her cousin, Tshe ring. She hesitated, but eventually called to Tshe skyid, igniting the watchdogs' ferocious, insane barking. Scared of the dogs, Lha mo dismounted from her riding yak and waited.

Alerted by the dogs' mad barking, Tshe skyid came out of the tent with

a flashlight, heard someone quietly calling her name, and noticed a yak near the livestock enclosure. Approaching the yak, she was frightened by a messy-haired, pale-faced woman. Realizing she was her husband's cousin, Tshe skyid was embarrassed and pretended not to be startled. When she invited Lha mo to come into the tent, she said, "Bring me a sheepskin and a mat. I'll sleep in the yak enclosure. I'm not afraid to sleep there."

Tshe skyid replied, "Foolish! We are one family! You spending a night at your cousin's home is fine."



"Grandmother said that a woman who visits a family at night brings bad luck. I also heard you gave birth a couple of months ago," Lha mo countered.

"We are relatives. It's fine if you spend a night at your cousin's home. You'll freeze in the yak enclosure," Tshe skyid persuaded.

Lha mo reluctantly nodded agreement, silently prayed to the local *bla*

*ma*, and murmured scriptures as she entered the tent.

Certain that his son had been terrified, Tshe ring melted a piece of lead in a metal scoop, told Tshe skyid to hold another scoop half-filled with water over their son's head, and poured the molten lead into the scoop. The lead immediately solidified into a shape that Tshe ring interpreted as resembling that of a woman. His grandmother had told him this method produced an image of what had frightened an ill child, and if the child wore this lead image on a string around its neck, it would recover.

Deducing that Lha mo had frightened his son, Tshe skyid put the image into a small bag and sewed it on the back of Tshe ring bkra shis' cradle.

The next morning, Tshe ring bkra shis was still crying loudly. Tshe ring worriedly decided to take Tshe ring bkra shis to see the local *bla ma*. He gently put Tshe ring bkra shis inside his robe pouch and mounted a calm white mare. On the way, he stopped at the tent of his friend, Tshe pe.

A doctor was visiting Tshe pe and had brought his medical kit with him, which always impressed others since he was the only doctor in the community. The doctor felt the baby's hands, inspected his ears and tongue, and said, "Tshe ring, your son has a cold. Give him this medicine. It's not serious," and handed him some powdered herbs wrapped in paper. An odor of medicine filled the air. "Don't worry. He'll be fine after taking medicine," assured the doctor.

"Thank you!" Tshe ring said and kissed his son, inside his robe pouch.

"Wait! Wait a moment! You also need to take some medicine for your cough. Your illness caused this baby's cold," the doctor said and handed Tshe ring more medicine.

Some days later, Lha mo again lost several of her yaks. She searched for hours but did not find them. Dark clouds moved in the sky as Lha mo descended a towering mountain. Deciding not to go home, but to continue searching the next day, she headed to Tshe ring' home. After dismounting near the yak enclosure, she called to Tshe skyid. The dogs barked furiously, but nobody emerged from the tent. She also noticed that the light in the tent went out. She squatted in the corner of the yak enclosure. Tears wetted her cheeks and plopped onto her lap, quickly becoming ice. She prayed for someone to show mercy as her thin body

shivered.


The next morning, pure white snow covered everything. Tshe ring got up, started a fire in the adobe stove, looked at his son, kissed him, and smiled. Tshe ring went out to pee and noticed his wife collecting yak dung in the yak enclosure. Suddenly she stood rigidly, seemingly unable to move. She had just stumbled on a frozen corpse in the yak enclosure. After a few moments, she recovered enough to rush to her husband.

Tshe skyid's face was pale, and it was hard for her to speak. Finally, she managed, "Lha mo's dead. She's in the yak enclosure. You wouldn't ... when the dogs barked last night. I said Lha mo was calling, but you ... "

Tshe ring' face flushed as he gazed at his wife as she raced to a neighbor's tent. Tshe ring sighed heavily, slowly walked to the yak enclosure, squatted near the corpse, pondered, and finally muttered, "I'm such a horrible person! My sister's daughter. I don't know ... I didn't let my wife go outside and bring you in last night. What's wrong with me?"

### 3

## ADMIRATION

t was an auspicious Tibetan New Year's Day, but it was also a depressing day for a little, six-year-old girl with a plump face wrapped in a red scarf.

Snow brightened an endless grassland and spectacular mountains. Women clad in greasy, time-worn sheepskin robes wore big smiles between reddish cheeks. They greeted one another while fetching water at daybreak and soon had wooden buckets full of fresh water on their backs. They predicted that the New Year would be propitious, trusting the phrase that decreed snow on the first day of the New Year was a very favorable portent. The truth of this bit of folk wisdom that had been passed down over many generations was never questioned. Children joyfully played outside rather than wash their faces and change their clothes. In fact, their only clothes were sheepskin robes and yak-hide boots.

Children peeped into a rich family's tent. The wind brought dust into the tent where a metal basin of fried bread and another metal basin of boiled beef sat on the right side. The appetizing odor wafting off the meat made the children salivate and feel hungry. They all hoped their parents would call them soon for lunch.

A six-year boy wearing a foxskin hat realized the red-scarfed girl was not playing with them. She was still sleeping. Her father was fond of her and, because of this, her older brother was jealous and hated her, but he also admired her. He had to get up early every morning and drive his family's yaks to grassy mountains and often imagined, "I would be the happiest child if I were her!"

The red-scarfed girl's grandmother lit a butter lamp and woke the girl. All the family members enjoyed a delicious meal while chatting loudly. It seemed it was the happiest day for them, even if they shared only one

basin of fried bread. But the red-scarfed girl had little appetite.

After lunch, the parents and children visited their neighbors and relatives. The red-scarfed girl sat on her grandmother's lap; sadness etched on her adorable plump face. Her grandmother wondered about the little girl and asked, "What happened? You should be happy. It's New Year's Day! Don't be sad!"

"All the other children got up early this morning, removed their grass-insoles from their shoes, threw the old insoles away, and put dry grass in their boots. They chanted the Six Sacred Syllables and spit where they threw their old insoles," explained the little girl.

"Don't worry. You can do the same on the next New Year's Day," her grandmother consoled.

"Grandmother, is it true if I change my insoles in the early morning of the New Year, chant the Six Sacred Syllables, and spit where I throw away the old insoles, my soul can drink the spit when it thirsts and the power of Six Sacred Syllables will lighten my soul's pain after I die?" asked the child.

"Yes, it's true. When I was a child like you, my father's mother told me the same story," the grandmother replied.

"I'm scared my soul will suffer thirst and I will be tortured if I die this year," said the little girl.

"My child, don't be silly! You will live forever because you are my dearest granddaughter," the old woman reassured.

At night, the little girl's two brothers sat on their grandfather's lap on the right side of the tent. One perched on each of their grandfather's knees, listening to his stories and folktales. The brothers pleaded for more stories. Seeing the boy's smiles, he happily told more stories to make them happier on this special day. Light from a butter lamp flickered in the tent. Under this dim light, the red-scarfed girl stared at her brothers for a while and noticed their boots. She put her head gently on her grandmother's lap, admiring her brothers. They had changed their insoles that morning and were now enjoying stories.

The grandmother, realizing she was still unhappy, stroked her head and asked, "My dearest, shall we go to bed?" knowing she could do nothing to make her happy.

The little girl did not reply.

An hour later, the little girl was in bed with her grandmother, her

head on a shared pillow. Her grandmother embraced and kissed her. The little girl watched her two brothers admiringly as they continued to enjoy their grandfather's stories. Sometimes they laughed loudly and tumbled on the ground. The little girl tried to smile as her brothers rolled about on the ground, but she could not.

Finally, she slept.





# 4

## AN ICED YELLOW LEAF

### Characters

the grandmother

the step-grandfather

Tshe lo

Tshe lo's grandmother

the grandmother's husband

the grandmother's grandchild

A crooked path led to a small wood, where yellow leaves were scattered at the base of the trees, crumbled into haphazard bits and pieces by the trampling of livestock. Whirlwinds propelled leaves and fragments into the air and across the surface of the ground where they danced energetically. Tshe lo stared motionlessly into the wood, a mild breeze blowing through his short hair. A lock of raggedly cut hair blurred his vision, but he did not react. He stood, motionlessly, at one end of the path.



One freezing morning, Tshe lo woke from a dream in which he had felt exhausted and slept while herding his family's yaks on a spectacular mountain. Somehow, he had plunged off a cliff and had awakened just in time. He woke up, wiped perspiration from his forehead, rubbed his eyes, and got out of bed. He wondered why his mother had not prepared breakfast and placed it by his pillow. Before she woke him, she always put a bowl of milk tea and a piece of *rtsam pa* by his pillow. He went out of the tent to pee and did not see his mother, so he walked to his family's yak enclosure where his step-grandfather, who was in his late fifties, was brutally beating a female yak to death with a big block of wood. Unable to watch this, Tshe lo covered his eyes with his hands and rushed back to

the tent as his step-grandfather glared at him.

The grandmother lit a butter lamp and prayed piously, her palms together and pressed against her forehead. Tears trickled down her wrinkled cheeks as Tshe lo stared at her from the tent entrance. Troubled by what he had just witnessed, and his mother's disappearance, he put his head on his grandmother's lap and silently thought as she stroked his head. He was hoping and waiting for her to explain the morning's unusualness.

The grandmother wiped away her tears when she heard Tshe lo snoring, picked him up in her arms, and carefully put him in his bed. Afraid of waking him, she gently covered him with his sheepskin robe, knelt next to him, and began chanting scriptures, holding a string of prayer beads in her left hand and a prayer wheel in the right. She chanted for a while and then dozed. The prayer wheel fell to the ground and rolled into some ash. Waking, she picked it up, put it on top of her head to atone for the sin of not keeping the prayer wheel in a clean, holy place, and resumed chanting scriptures while glancing at her grandson, who was now snoring loudly, tears trickling from his eyes as he slept.

Several months passed. Tshe lo played with the calf whose mother the boy's step-grandfather had beaten to death. After Tshe lo's mother died, few children wanted to play with him, so the calf became his best friend and playmate. Tshe lo made sure the calf grazed and drank water near his family tent. He did not allow the calf to graze with the other yaks, fearing wolves would kill it.

Every late evening, he secretly dipped milk into a bent metal scoop from his grandmother's wooden bucket, added salt and warm tea, and fed it to the calf that rushed over when he appeared in the yak enclosure holding the red scoop in his hand.

One day, Tshe lo's step-grandfather saw Tshe lo feeding the orphan calf with milk and realized stray dogs had not stolen the missing milk. A bit later, a local doctor visited Tshe lo's grandmother, examined her, and suggested she eat nutritious food such as milk, butter, and meat. Tshe lo was sure it was impossible to provide his grandmother with meat every day. Besides, his step-grandfather was pious and would never kill the family's three sacred yaks, nor would he kill their two female yaks. To do so would mean no calves.

It was hard to get butter in winter, but easier to obtain milk. The step-

grandfather had milked after the grandmother had become seriously ill. Tshe lo wondered if he should feed the calf with milk tea or leave the milk for his grandmother. He puzzled about this for some days. He dared not ask his step-grandfather, who he feared, not because he often beat him, but because he never smiled. Also, his step-grandfather had warned him not to steal milk again, or he would beat him severely.

One evening Tshe lo went to the yak enclosure. The calf ran over, sniffed him, and licked his hands. Feeling sympathy and pity, he went back to the tent and got a dipper of milk. At the entrance of the yak enclosure, he met his step-grandfather who slapped him without a word.

The scoop of milk splashed on the ground.


The grandfather slapped him again and said, "Stupid boy! Feeding your enemy! Fool! Don't you know how your mother died? When I reached the yak enclosure, she was dying. That orphan calf's mother gored her in the belly. You don't love your grandmother! Instead, you love that enemy orphan calf. Fool!"

Tshe lo was eight and puzzled by the word "enemy." He said nothing and rushed to the small wood near the tent.

Snow encased in ice covered the trees. No creature made a sound. The only sound was the wind's whispers. Tshe lo's gaze was fixed on a decayed yellow leaf clutched to the earth, swathed in a transparent piece of ice.

## 5

# BUILDING A TEMPLE

 little six-year-old boy was so attached to his grandmother that he would sleep with nobody else. She got up early and recited mantras in front of a Buddha image in the right, upper part of the tent. Later, she lit a butter lamp and gazed at her grandchild, who still slept in their bed.

Willow branches had been cut by her son, the boy's father, who spread the branches on the ground in the lower part of the left side of the tent, and covered them with a sheepskin mat. The father was proud that he had made a comfortable bed for his mother, who was in her seventies.

The grandmother woke the boy after she had readied breakfast. The little boy rolled back and forth in the bed once his grandmother woke him. She knew she spoiled the boy, who had become very stubborn. It was hard to persuade him to do something if he didn't want to. She placed a bowl of milk with thick cream on the surface near his pillow and handed him a ball of *rtsam pa*.

The little boy soon finished drinking the milk but didn't eat the *rtsam pa*, whining that his grandmother had not washed her hands. The *rtsam pa* was dirty, he declared. His grandmother smiled, kissed his forehead, and ate the *rtsam pa*.

The little boy did not intend to get up, but he had to urinate, so he threw off his grandmother's sheepskin robe that he had used as a blanket and ran outside naked. The grandmother watched the boy as he ran out of the tent. She smiled, noticing he was growing.

The little boy rubbed his eyes and yawned as he urinated. He heard and saw his parents and neighbors separating his family yaks into two groups. His father and two young men were mounted on horses and chased some yaks, which ran to another herd. The boy loudly laughed when he saw one young man tumble off his horse while chasing the boy's

favorite yak, a red, polled male. The little boy watched until his mother came home and his father and the young men drove a herd of yaks in the direction of the local monastery.

The grandmother sat near the tent door, enjoying the sunshine. The boy plopped in his grandmother's lap and demanded, "Dear Grandmother! Is Father going to sell all the yaks? Father won't sell all eighty yaks to the butchers, right? He promised he wouldn't sell my favorite yak to the slaughterers."

His grandmother murmured, put her palms together, touched her forehead, paused, and replied, "Our family will accumulate merit by donating yaks to the local monastery. The *bla ma* will build a huge new temple."

The little boy lightly punched his grandmother and said, "I hate Father! He is a bad man. He doesn't love me! He will give my beloved yak to others. From now on, I'm not going to love Father!"



His grandmother chuckled and said, "Don't worry! Yaks that sacrifice

themselves to build a temple go to Heaven after they die. Whatever they want immediately appears in front of them the instant they want it. They can play all the time and swim in fresh water under beautiful trees where birds are singing. They joyfully live there and never suffer."

The little boy had never heard about Heaven. He was curious, but just as he was going to ask his grandmother about it, a playmate called. He was riding a stick, pretending it was a horse near his family tent. The little boy suddenly remembered that they had agreed on a horserace competition. He ran into his own family's tent, grabbed a stick, and rushed to his friend.

They raced many times but were unsure who was the winner. During the first race, the little boy was faster than his playmate, but the second time, his playmate was much faster. They did not agree on the final victor and continued racing until they got thirsty. They ran to a nearby creek, lay on the ground, and gulped fresh water without pausing or raising their heads. Once their thirst was quenched, they lay on their backs and looked up into the sky. After some minutes, the little boy realized his friend was sleeping.

Not bothering his friend, he kept looking into the sky, imagining that one day he would be in Heaven with his beloved yak, where they would enjoy their lives for all eternity. He would pick beautiful flowers and decorate his cherished yak in Heaven. He would ride the yak and sing herding songs, which would attract many little angels. He would play hide-and-seek with the angels, and if they lost, he would kiss their red cheeks. The little boy's favorite fruit was apples, and he imagined he would eat apples with the angels and his beloved yak when they got tired. He suddenly paused and asked himself, "How can I get to Heaven? When will I be there?"

He stood and raced home to find his grandmother was absent, so he asked his mother, "Dear Mother! How can people go to Heaven?"

His mother stared at him for a moment and said, "After they die."

Her son said, "Is Heaven real? Where is it?"

His mother did not know the answers, so she did not reply.

The little boy waited and then offered, "Dear Mother, I want to die and go to Heaven."

His mother thought this was ominous, swatted his buttocks, and warned, "I'll beat you more seriously if I hear you say you want to die

again."

The little boy sobbed and waited for his grandmother to return. He wanted to ask her if Heaven was real, but thought she would also beat him if he asked.

After a while, the mother noticed her son was lying silently on the bed. She hoped he was no longer thinking about Heaven.



# 6

## DILEMMA

### Characters

Lha mo

Mtsho mo

Rdo rje

Mtsho mo's mother

Lha mo's daughter

Mtsho mo's fiancé

Mtsho mo struggled with ambivalent thoughts. A beautiful young girl with a good family background rarely fled from her home to become a nun. Pious herdswomen never wished to become nuns. While widows and notorious women became nuns, few did so from earnest belief. Mtsho mo was puzzled. Should she leave her mother?



Mtsho mo closely watched a calf thrust its tail into the air, romp to its mother, and ferociously nurse as the mother licked its rear. Tears streamed down Mtsho mo's ruddy cheeks as she recalled beautiful memories of her mother, Lha mo, who loved her, an only child. Lha mo didn't ask Mtsho mo to herd until she was twenty, worried she would be unhappy. Mtsho mo often played with her peers and sometimes forgot to prepare food until her mother returned home. Lha mo never complained, even if Mtsho mo had not made a fire in their adobe stove when she drove their yaks back home on frigid snowy days.

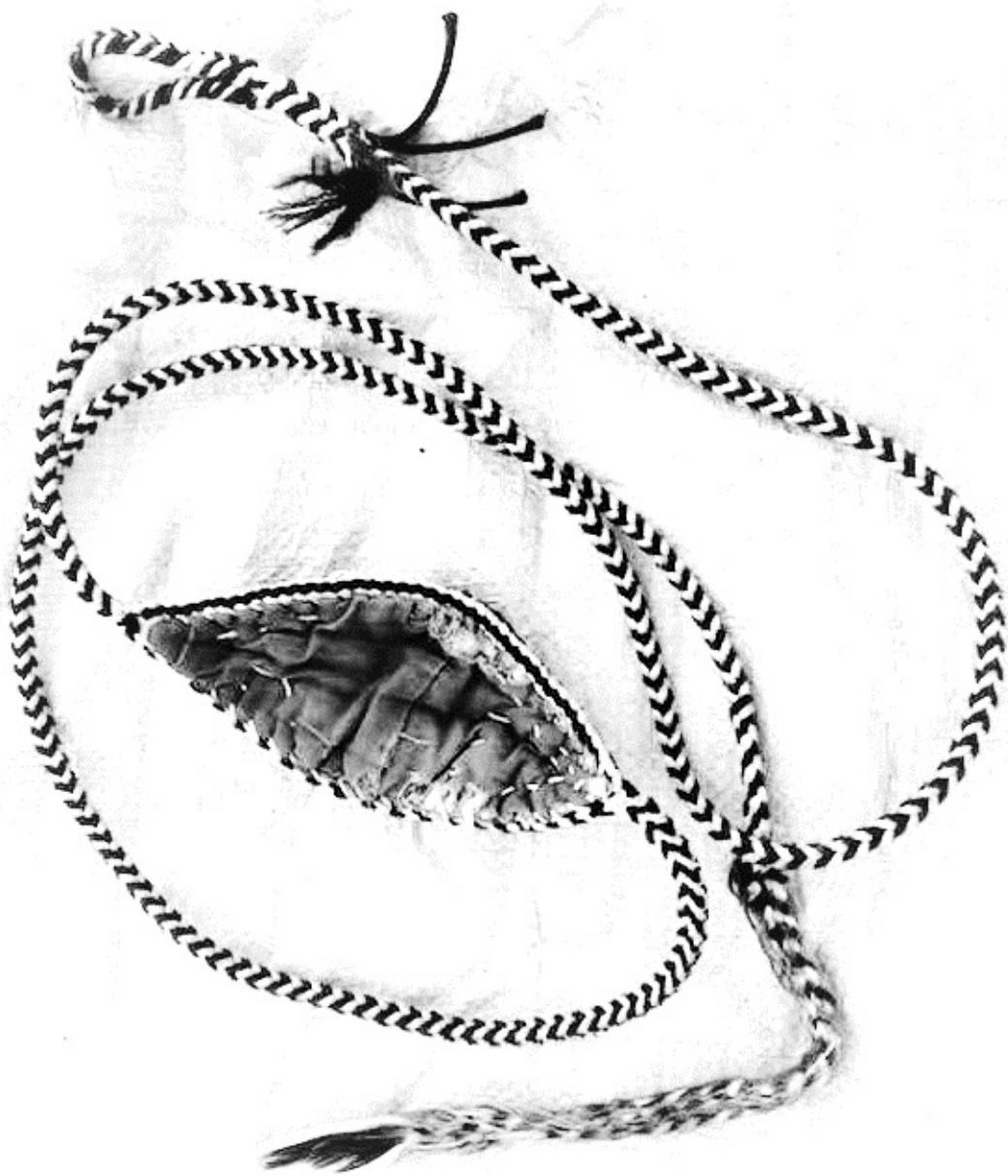
Mtsho mo's attractive appearance attracted many local boys. She rejected countless offers of engagement. Her stubborn, multiple refusals disappointed her mother, so she stopped persuading her to marry. A

handsome local man, Rdo rje, lived in Mtsho mo's home as Mtsho mo's fiancé. He was ten years older than Mtsho mo and pitied Mtsho mo, whose father had been killed in tribal conflict over grassland when she was an infant. Some months later, he fully understood Mtsho mo's childish behavior.

One day, Mtsho mo returned home with her family's livestock and dismounted from her horse. She was terribly thirsty and rushed inside the family tent to see her mother locked in an embrace as Rdo rje was about to kiss her.


...

Mtsho mo stopped remembering. Dark thick clouds were moving and thundering in from the horizon. Sure it would rain, she gazed at her home at the bottom of the mountain where she was herding livestock. She left, but her sling remained. Maybe she had forgotten it, maybe not.



## 7

# HOMELESS, CRAZY MONK

fter his grandmother's death, Big Son began wandering. He no longer visited close family members and other relatives, nor did he go to his monastery and join classes. He even refused those asking for his help in conducting death rituals.

He was not dirty, he washed his face and feet in streams in summer, but his cassock was faded and worn. He put big leaves on his head for protection when the summer sun was scorching hot. His few belongings included a shabby yellow cloth and a single-strap shoulder bag that contained a Buddhist scripture, which he carefully read paragraph by paragraph. He contemplated for a long time after finishing each paragraph.

He went everywhere on foot. No horses, yaks, cars, or motorcycle for him. He was known as a homeless, crazy monk.

A year passed, and no one knew what had happened to him. His relatives worried, except for his younger brother.

"We must hold a death ritual for Big Son. He's been gone for a year, so he must be dead. I don't want to hear rumors about our family and see our family's reputation destroyed," said the father.



"We don't need to worry. Big Son is an omniscient monk and doesn't need our help. Furthermore, we can do nothing for him," Little Son said quietly and politely, his head lowered.

"Nonsense! He doesn't even understand he should come home to visit his family! He is a monk and should stay in the monastery and chant scriptures," said the father.

"He loves his family members and wants to visit, but he can't. He understands everything as he wanders and thus evades greedy samsara," said Little Son, as he slowly rolled and unrolled the red cloth edging of his robe's right sleeve while running his hand through his disheveled hair.

"He doesn't know he is foolish and crazy. How impossible for him to attain the knowledge required to evade samsara. What a foolish monk! He lets lice bite and drink his blood instead of killing them," the father said.

"He's not silly. He pities the lice. They feel hunger and pain as do other sentient beings. He is a true Buddhist who follows the Buddha's

most essential teachings! He is very clever and understands what he should do and where he should live according to his understanding of samsara, rather than chanting scriptures with others surrounding him. He believes self-control is most important," said Little Son, glancing at his father while sticking out his tongue.

"You mean we are bad, ignorant people? Locals say he is crazy!" the father said, his face hot and flushed.

"It's easy to say a person is crazy, but it is really hard to know who is truly insane," said Little Son.

The father said nothing as he glared at Little Son, pondering for a while, murmuring incomprehensibly.

"He feels nothing because he understands everything and has everything. He lives peacefully as he wanders. He is happy," said Little Son, lifting his head and briefly glancing at his father.

The father was frozen by what Little Son had said. There was no more conversation.

Little Son recalled what his brother, had said before he had left a year ago. "When I feel nothing, I understand everything. ... When I feel nothing, I have everything. ... I am content."

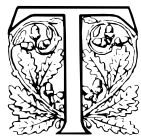
# 8

## HORSE HERDER

### Characters

'Jam lu	a local leader
Bzang lo	Tshe bzang's friend
Don lo	a great hunter
Don pe	Tshe bzang's herding- mate
Dpal bzang	Tshe bzang's neighbor
Pad mo	Tshe bzang's grandmother
Tshe bzang	Pad mo's grandson





she bzang was dreaming, enjoying the celebration of Pad mo's (his grandmother) eightieth year in the family's patched, black yak-hair tent. Tshe bzang gazed at a piece of beef. As he walked over to pick it up, his feet collided with his grandmother's sheepskin boots. He fell to the ground, and his nose began bleeding. He woke up, rubbed his nose, and was shocked at finding crusts of dried blood stuck to his upper lip and nostrils. He had been dreaming.

Tshe bzang got up early the next morning, made a fire in the adobe stove, and boiled tea in a kettle covered with soot. Once the kettle became noisy, he picked it up. He hated the noise of boiling tea.

Once he had dreamed of being with the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, who was from his community, unfortunately, the sound of tea boiling woke him. He was afraid to meet that girl and tell her how much he loved her, but he often prayed for a lover before he went to bed, hoping he would meet her in the world of dreams.

He put *rtsam pa* and a chunk of butter in his wooden bowl and added some hot tea. Unusually, this time he did not add dry cheese.

The grandmother was happy when she saw Tshe bzang having *rtsam pa* with a lot of dried cheese. She liked to munch on dry cheese when she was bored. Tshe bzang had searched in his family's old *rtsam pa* box several times, which convinced him there was no cheese in the box. Nevertheless, it was a wonderful, simple breakfast.

After breakfast, Tshe bzang took several horses to a lush, grass-covered mountain. His grandmother had asked him to be a horse-herder for the community. He knew that his payment would provide better conditions for his family, but he disliked the work. The local leaders faced great challenges when dealing with elders who eagerly tried to get jobs. Older adults lacked the strength to do hard work that young people could do, but they wanted equal payment.

Tshe bzang dismounted, sat on a knoll, and enjoyed the view. On this cloudy, windy day, he pulled the upper part of his sheepskin robe up over the top of his head. As he warmed up, he wanted to sing but lacked the confidence to do so.

Once his herding-mate, Don pe, had heard him singing and told him he had a nice voice, and encouraged him to practice. Tshe bzang thought Don pe was teasing and blushed when he heard him tell other locals he

had a good voice. Afterward, he carefully looked in every direction and sang quietly, even when he was high in the mountains.

On another mountain, some herders assembled, sang love songs, and laughed loudly. He realized that he was old enough to find a lover and marry. His grandmother was concerned about his marriage and urged him to marry the next year when he turned fifteen.

Boys were generally excited about their impending marriage and were eager to meet the spouses their parents had arranged for them. Some even saw their betrothed before marriage. In contrast, Tshe bzang had little interest in his future marriage. A bigger concern was celebrating his grandmother's eightieth birthday.

Tshe bzang was an introverted teenager with few friends. However, his loyal, sincere behavior had earned the locals' respect. They were willing to help him, which made it easier to ask others to help him prepare for the celebration, but he did not plead for help from anyone. He never forgot the Buddhist injunction, "*Rang nyid rang gi mgon yin* 'You are your own master'," which his grandfather had told him as a dying injunction three years earlier.

Late in the evening, a man clad in a big sheepskin robe and riding a red horse crossed over a forested mountain. Rays from the dying sun colored the horse still redder. The man kicked the mount's flanks and approached Tshe bzang.

The rider looked exactly like the mountain deity his grandmother had often described. Locals believed mountain deities punished hunters and brought bad luck to the family of a man who hunted on sacred mountains where deities dwelled.

Tshe bzang was afraid of this rider's sudden appearance. He suddenly recalled that some days ago, he had found a freshly-killed deer on a holy mountain and had taken home the flesh the wolves had left. His grandparents had taught him to ask the mountain deities' permission before taking flesh, but he had forgotten to say, "*Ngas khyod la slong ba yin, rkus pa min* 'I am not stealing from you, I am begging you'." There was no problem if you said this.

Tshe bzang grew more terrified, imagining a mountain deity had come to punish him for taking the deer flesh without asking permission. When the rider came closer, he realized he had a rifle on his back. Tshe bzang was petrified. The hair on his neck stood up. His oily, red, round face

turned pale. Unable to scream, he sat like a wooden image. Fortunately, the rider spoke to him in human language but, not quickly recovering, Tshe bzang could only reply when the man dismounted and sat by him.

Don lo was a great hunter in Tshe bzang's community. Don lo gently stroked Tshe bzang's head after reading the expression on his troubled face and asked sympathetically, "How are you? Are you OK?"

Tshe bzang did not respond and began wailing loudly.

Don lo thought his grandmother had passed away and finally asked, "Are you hungry? Are you ill?"

After a bit, Tshe bzang put his head down, plucked a blade of long grass, and broke it into small bits. Don lo noticed Tshe bzang's cheeks were becoming increasingly flushed. Finally, he replied, "I thought you were a mountain deity, coming to kill me," and giggled very quietly.

Tshe bzang's genuine explanation earned Don lo's sympathy. He stroked Tshe bzang's head again and said, "I am your maternal uncle. I am responsible for you. I promised your mother I'd look after you as she was dying."

Dusk came. Don lo and Tshe bzang took Tshe bzang's seven horses back home. They did not speak. Tshe bzang rode behind his uncle. The wind blew ash and dirt near Tshe bzang's tent. The family's watchdog barked at his uncle. These noises made Tshe bzang's feel more isolated and alone. Regretting that he had ever been born, he thought, again, "My birth killed my mother. I have committed the most horrible sin."

Don lo and Pad mo chatted while having dinner. Tshe bzang went to bed without eating, placing his head on the old sheepskin robe full of holes that he had worn as a baby. He folded it for a pillow that had been drenched by his silent tears countless times, and then dried, becoming so stiff that it hurt his head and ears. He tried unsuccessfully to sleep. Mulling over how to atone for his sin, he finally slept.

...

One sunny winter day, locals headed to the tent of 'Jam lu, the community leader. Old people basked in the sun and leaned against 'Jam lu's family's yak-dung-wall that circled the tent. Sunshine began to melt the icy yard, filling the air with the smell of yak dung and urine. Some children played excitedly, throwing yak dung at each other. Children too

shy to play with the other children held one of their parents' robe sleeves. Some who had gathered seemed very unhappy, knowing it was the day the leaders would announce a year's payment.

Leader 'Jam lu emerged from his tent. Locals quieted as children ran to their parents and sat near them. Tshe bzang sat alone at the end of a row, imagining his year's payment would be five RMB for herding horses. His horses were fatter than other herders' horses. He imagined buying a sheep from the commune for three RMB and then celebrating his grandmother's eightieth birthday.



Unfortunately, he only got a half- RMB, because he had to compensate for two horses killed by wolves. He regretted visiting his relatives and neighbors and ignoring the herd of horses. He had let them roam everywhere until night when he drove them back home. Sometimes he ate delicious meals in his relatives' homes and on other, unlucky days, he had gone hungry.

Tshe bzang was disappointed by his payment and astonished when community leaders praised three hunters from his community and awarded them a fat sheep as a reward for killing wolves. Brimming with admiration, some locals also vowed to hunt wolves the next year so their families could also enjoy delicious, fresh mutton.

Locals laughed loudly when 'Jam lu detailed how the hunters had stumbled upon a wolf cub while hunting, had shot and killed it to see who was the best shot, and then brought the carcass to the commune leaders.

Tshe bzang normally reported what he saw to his grandmother, but this time, he said nothing about the meeting. His grandmother was busy making butter lamps, melting a chunk of butter in a pot on the adobe stove. Tshe bzang knew there was little butter to eat, but he never scolded his grandmother. He let her do whatever she wanted.

Wrinkles covered the grandmother's face as she lit a butter lamp. She was very old, and he worried that she would die soon. He knew he would regret it if he could not finance a celebration for her eightieth birthday, and pondered again how to get a sheep for the celebration. His neighbor, Dpal bzang, had bought a sheep at a very low price from the commune and had celebrated his grandfather's eightieth birthday. Participants at the celebration agreed it was the best party they had ever joined.

...

One sunny day in May, Tshe bzang and his friend, Bzang lo, searched big caves in a narrow valley. They had heard that wolves had killed many yaks in this valley. Tshe bzang believed Bzang lo's declaration that catching and killing a wolf cub was better than herding horses for a year and being paid a half RMB. They looked for cubs the whole day but returned home empty-handed that night.

Grandmother Pad mo noticed Tshe bzang's lack of interest in herding and encouraged him to take good care of the horses. She told him hunting and hurting sentient beings were hideous acts, explaining that people could atone for their sins if they stopped hunting and regretted the cruel things they had done to animals.

Tshe bzang welcomed this, recalling how his mother had died giving birth to him. He promised his grandmother he would be a vegetarian and would stop killing lice on his body and in his hair.

Some days later, Bzang lo came to Tshe bzang's tent and asked him to search for wolf cubs with him. Tshe bzang refused, but Bzang lo pleaded, so Tshe bzang reluctantly followed his best friend, who was very kind to him.

The sunshine made them thirsty. They drank a lot of fresh water from a creek, and Tshe bzang napped near the stream. Meanwhile, Bzang lo wiped perspiration from his brow while searching for a wolf den. When he saw Tshe bzang napping, he wondered why he had lost interest in searching for wolves.

When Tshe bzang woke up, he saw Bzang lo with his uncle, Don lo, who was on horseback with a rifle on his back. Tshe bzang knew Don lo had been hunting. When Don lo explained that hunting was not a good thing for teenagers to do, Tshe bzang smiled and said, "Uncle Don lo, we are not hunting. We are going to catch a wolf cub."

"How could you catch cubs without any experience?" Uncle Don lo asked. "It's better if you go home and herd livestock."

Uncle Don lo read Bzang lo's unhappy face. He understood that a proud teenager would reject criticism.

Believing he could catch a cub, Bzang lo retorted, "We will catch a cub! Don't denigrate us."

Uncle Don lo chortled, realizing that Bzang lo had gumption and said approvingly, "OK. Let's hunt together! You can be my assistants!"

Since it was early evening, both boys agreed when Uncle Don lo suggested returning home to prepare for their hunt the next day.

Tshe bzang went to bed after dinner and thought again about his grandmother's birthday celebration. He worried about his promise to his grandmother not to kill living beings, but still felt he had to prepare a sheep for the celebration. The easy way to meet his goal would be to catch a cub, take it to the leaders, and get a sheep as a reward. But he also knew he would accumulate sin if he caught a wolf cub and the leaders killed it. Considering all of this gave him a headache.



Early the next morning, Tshe bzang headed to Uncle Don lo's tent, while glancing back at his family's tent several times. When he had almost reached his destination, he stopped and stood silently. Suddenly, he turned and saw his grandmother holding a string of prayer beads in her left hand near the tent door. He suddenly recalled that today was his mother's death anniversary.

# 9

## INJUSTICE

### Characters

Bkra shis	the community's leader's brother and Rdo rje's father
Don pe	Tshe ring's brother, killed by Rdo rje
Grags pa	Zla ba's son, killed Rdo rje
Mtsho mo	Bkra shis' daughter
Rdo rje	Bkra shis' son, killed by Grags pa
Tshe don	a rich man
Tshe ring	Tshe skyid's son, Don pe's brother
Tshe skyid	Tshe ring and Don pe's mother
Zla ba	Tshe ring's maternal uncle





ne chilly winter afternoon, Tshe ring lay tiredly on the ground near his family's tent, listlessly registering seven sheep that were calmly munching on dry grass nearby. Recalling that he had herded sheep for his community leader's family for a year, he knew he should appreciate Tshe don giving him this opportunity. He had also given him seven sheep and a new sheepskin robe. It was not easy for poor people to get a job, and he understood he was lucky.

He stared at the new robe next to him. It was folded and somehow resembled a plump marmot. A smile flickered for a moment across his unwashed face. But suddenly, he plunged into a pool of grief, tears mournfully trickling from his big dark-brown eyes.

Realizing such emotion served no useful purpose, he wiped away his tears. He folded the new robe and rested his head on it. Wrapped up in his sheepskin, he tried to nap.

As dusk deepened, he entered his family's empty tent. Assuming his mother, Tshe skyid, was still at a neighbor's tent, he lit a butter lamp and made a fire in the adobe stove. He felt especially lonely when the blackened kettle began singing on the stove. He didn't feel like eating alone.

Finally, his mother arrived. They had not seen each other for a year. Both smiled. They were happy.

After a meal, Tshe skyid took out a yak-skin bag from her robe pouch, opened it, and poured the barley flour it contained into two bowls. Tshe ring pitied his mother, who had worked all day earning only two bowls of flour. Nevertheless, he noticed that she was pleased to be able to do chores for the neighbor.

Recalling that he had not shown his mother his new robe, he unfolded it and proudly held it up. He was startled when she burst into tears and wailed. Understanding, he hurriedly stuffed the robe back into a black yak-hair bag, trying to delete what this tragic reminder was all about.

They lay down for the night in a silent tent that seemed empty. Unable to sleep, Tshe ring wrestled with memories. Three years ago, his brother, Don pe, had been a hard-working shepherd. Their community's leader's brother, Bkra shis, hoped he would herd his family's sheep as long as he wanted. All of Bkra shis' family members were kind to Don pe, who was content to live with them.

One morning Don pe noticed Bkra shis' daughter, Mtsho mo, had hung a new sheepskin robe over a tent-rope to sun. Attracted by the robe's beauty, Don pe recalled that his mother often mentioned how wonderful it would be to own a new sheepskin robe. She periodically scolded Don pe for being so incapable that he could not even buy or make a new robe for her.

On that day, Don pe asked Bkra shis for permission to visit his mother for a couple of days. Bkra shis agreed.

Don pe mounted a horse and rode toward home. When he saw his family's tent in the far distance, he realized his mother and brother were both standing by the tent entrance. Hearing the clatter of horse hooves pounding the frozen ground behind him, he turned and saw Bkra shis' son, Rdo rje, holding a sword in his right hand. His black horse was panting, perspiration dripping from its legs and belly.

Tshe ring dared not continue recollecting. He panted and stared through the tent's smoke-hole at stars that seemed to shiver. He felt cold.

...

Three years later, Tshe ring and his maternal uncle, Zla ba, were counting yaks in Zla ba's yak enclosure, which was near Tshe ring's tent. They separated eighty yaks. Tshe ring and Zla ba then rode two horses and drove the eighty yaks toward Bkra shis' tent. Bkra shis was standing outside, spinning a prayer wheel in his right hand and holding a string of prayer beads in his left.



Another killing. Tshe ring felt sorry that Grags pa had killed Rdo rje in revenge for Don pe's death. Rage burned in Tshe ring's heart when he saw Bkra shis. Zla ba had given the eighty yaks to Bkra shis' family to compensate for Rdo rje's death.

Tshe ring headed home after eating in Uncle Zla ba's tent. He was confused. Why had Bkra shis' family given only eight yaks to his family in compensation for Rdo rje killing Don pe. Bkra shis was the brother of Tshe don, the most powerful person in their community. Locals obeyed all his commands. Tshe ring guessed that ex-plained why only a few yaks had been given.

...

When Tshe skyid saw Tshe ring riding a black horse near her family's tent, she recalled her oldest son and tears flowed. That horrible moment flashed in her mind again: Don pe had tried to speak after Rdo rje had stabbed him. Rdo rje had tried to pull the sword from Don pe's gut but failed. Don pe attempted to dismount but, unable to move very easily, had gripped the sword in his right hand.

Rdo rje methodically untied the new sheepskin robe from Don pe's saddle, and as blood puddled on the ground, he grabbed the robe and spat, "Shameless thief! Go to Hell!" whipped his horse and disappeared.

Don pe had raised his head a little and gazed at his family's tent. His mother and brother rushed to him as he slowly fell from the horse.

...

Tshe ring dismounted but did not enter his family's tent. He hunched near the tent entrance and pondered why Bkra shis' family gave only eight yaks to compensate for Don pe's death. "Is there justice for impoverished, powerless families?" he mumbled.

# 10

## MIRROR

### Characters

Do po

Mtsho mo

Pad mo

Rdor lo

Tshe kho

Rdor lo's brother

Do po's wife

Tshe kho's wife

Do po's brother

Pad mo's husband

**M**uffled, barely audible sounds emanated from a tent. Tshe kho, in his early sixties and a father of two, sat cross-legged on his bed, reciting scriptures. He did this for two hours every morning, resembling a meditator with his sheepskin robe draped over his upper body and his lower body wrapped in another warm robe. When he finished, he unfolded his now-stiff legs and left the tent to urinate.

Hearing a ewe bleat, he strode to the sheep pen, wearing a robe without a sash. Noticing his long sleeves brushing the frozen ground, he flung them over his shoulders and guessed a ewe had given birth in the night and the lamb had frozen to death. He searched for a lamb's carcass but found nothing but a few bits of sheep hair and fresh bone fragments. Imagining what had happened, he cursed his family's watchdogs.

Pad mo read anger in her husband's face as she offered him breakfast and put a soot-bottomed pot half full of water on the adobe stove in the tent.

Tshe kho ferociously said, "Our family's watchdogs are useless! Don't add a lot of flour to that pot. They need to be hungry to be more alert. Last night, wolves attacked our sheep and killed a lamb."

Pad mo ignored her husband, and surreptitiously added a generous amount of flour to the pot. Afraid to say anything directly to her husband, she quietly murmured, stressing the importance of reducing the suffering of all sentient beings.

Some days later, Tshe kho was very ill. Concerned, Pad mo urged him to rest at home and promised to take good care of the sheep. However, Tshe kho worried about her limited experience herding sheep so, after breakfast, he dressed warmly and herded the sheep to a mountain covered with lush grass. Staring after him as he grew smaller in the distance, Pad mo realized that he had become as thin as a skeleton.

After supper, Pad mo sat next to her husband. She knew his health was deteriorating, though he said he was fine. Upset about his poor health, she grew angrier with her youngest son, Rdor lo, who roamed about and was not filial. However, she did not want to have another argument with Rdor lo about his level of concern for his parents.

The following day, Rdor lo's older brother, Do po, got up early and made a fire in the adobe stove in the tent he shared with his wife and children. He woke his children just as the black kettle began whistling on

the stove. He asked his wife, Mtsho mo, to herd the yaks signaling that he would visit the township town. While there, Do po met people from Tshe kho's community and inquired about his parents. He felt uneasy if he did not hear news of them at least once a month.

Do po felt guilty that he could not often care for and spend more time with his parents. He had married Mtsho mo and now lived in her community, which was far from his parents' tent.

Rdor lo returned to his parents' home only when he heard his father was sick. As he squatted near his father's bed, Tshe kho gently stroked his son's head, saying nothing but smiling broadly.

Pad mo made *rtsam pa*, and prepared a bowl of hot milk for her husband, and asked Rdor lo to have lunch with her. Rdor lo told his mother to take good care of his father and said he would herd the sheep.

After Rdor lo's departure, Tshe kho said that Rdor lo was a good son and he was proud of him, because every time he got sick, Rdor lo was the first to visit.

Rdor lo herded the sheep for five days. Each day the number of sheep decreased. When his mother asked why Rdor lo explained that wolves were attacking the flock.

Pad mo did not tell her husband about the diminishing flock. She wondered why her son was so eager to herd their sheep and wondered why no vultures hovered in the sky.

Five days later, Do po arrived and upon seeing his father, tears trickled from his eyes.

Tshe kho was not very glad to see him. Anger colored his face. Maybe it was because Do po had only visited several days into his illness and maybe also because he thought Do po was feigning concern and actually did not love him very much. After all, Do po had married and moved into his wife's tent in a distant community.

Do po urged his father to go to the township clinic, but Tshe kho stubbornly refused.



Do po spent several days with his parents. During that time, Tshe kho seemed to be improving, so he felt very glad to be with his parents. When he left for his own home, he felt sad that his father had rejected his suggestion to have his health checked. He also understood that his father thought he was not filial.

The next day, when Tshe kho got up and went out of the tent, he saw two riders galloping toward his home. Once they arrived, he asked them to dismount and welcomed them into his tent. Instead, they bellowed, "Where is Rdor lo? He has given us twenty sheep in the last five days, but he owes us ten more. He was our gambling mate. We'll kill him if he doesn't give us ten more sheep in the next two days!" and then rode away in a cloud of dust.

Shocked by what he had just heard, Tshe kho staggered back into the tent.

Pad mo was looking into a piece of broken mirror. She had heard it all and immediately understood why their sheep had become fewer and



fewer. She also recalled the last time her husband had been ill. Rdor lo was the first to visit and had "kindly" offered to herd. Their sheep had also steadily decreased. She looked at her husband dejectedly, poured warm water into a red basin, asked Tshe kho to wash his face, handed him the piece of broken mirror, and said, "Here - the mirror."

Tshe kho stared at his reflection and took a long, deep breath.

# 11

## MTSHO MO AND THE LITTLE BOY

### Characters

Bkra shis

Lha mo

Mtsho mo


Rdo rje

Mtsho mo's neighbor's son

Rdo rje's wife

a beautiful woman

Lha mo's husband

tsho mo wore a sheepskin robe trimmed with bright, colored cloth. As she squatted near her family's tent flap, she held her right sleeve over her mouth. Her family members talked endlessly inside. No one came outside to chat with her.

In the early evening, Mtsho mo gazed at her neighbor's six-year-old boy, Bkra shis, plucking fragrant flowers on a stream bank near his family's tent. He sniffed the flowers, smiled, and then delightedly tried to catch butterflies flitting among the flowers. When the little boy tumbled, Mtsho mo murmured, "Oh my Buddha!"

The little boy lay on his back, sniffed the flowers clutched in his hand, and imagined that the flocks of floating clouds above his head were his neighbor's sheep. Feeling sleepy, he stood and noticed Mtsho mo, stared at her for a while, and then rushed to his home.

"Mother! I saw Sister Mtsho mo squatting by her family's tent door yesterday and today. She looks very sad. What happened?" asked Bkra shis.

"Dear baby! Little boys shouldn't ask the same questions older people do," replied his mother, Lha mo.

"Mother, may I go talk to Sister Mtsho mo? I want to play with her son, Tshe ring," implored Bkra shis.

"No, you can't play with Tshe ring," declared his father, Rdo rje.

Bkra shis wondered why his father did not give permission and wanted to ask but dared not. He blinked and stared at his father, clad in a sheepskin robe trimmed with black cloth, sitting crossed-legged in the right part of the tent. His greasy, unreadable face scared Bkra shis. No longer looking at him, he clambered onto his mother's lap.

"Mtsho mo wants to divorce, but her parents are urging her to return to her husband's home again," said Lha mo.

"She shouldn't divorce. Her husband's family is wealthy, and his father is the leader of their community. Locals obey him. She would never find another man with such a good family background to marry," reasoned Rdo rje.

"Of course! Everyone wants to marry someone wealthy, but a woman wants her husband to be kind and to love her; otherwise, they won't be happy!" exclaimed Lha mo.

"Mother, you are right. Sister Mtsho mo is unhappy. I saw her sitting

alone and not talking to her family members," said Bkra shis.

The parents looked at their cute little boy and smiled, but ignored what he had said.



"It's so hard for a woman to live alone. Maybe Mtsho mo should return to her husband's home and live with him, even if he is cruel and beats her," suggested Lha mo.

"Her husband is kind to her family and helps them. Her parents are pleased about this. They admire Bzang lo and are persuading Mtsho mo to return to his home," said Rdo rje.

"I hate Father when he beats me. I don't want him to beat me again. I don't love Father when he doesn't let me do what I want and forces me to do something else," Bkra shis whispered to his mother.

"Mtsho mo told her parents Bzang lo treats her like a slave. She can't bear such abuse and also can't forget a handsome local man she has loved since they were children. She wants to marry him. Anyway, life is unfair.

We can't do what we want because everything is fate. You can't change it. Why didn't she tell her parents about her lover before they arranged the marriage?" said Lha mo.

The little boy thought a powerless person must follow those with power just as he obeyed his father's commands. Though eager to do what he wanted, he did not if his father disagreed.

"Mtsho mo's parents thought she would have a happy life if she married a rich man. They didn't want their daughter to marry her poor lover," said Rdo rje.

"Mtsho mo's parents regret that they arranged the marriage and forced her to marry. Now, they insist she return to her husband's home. Bzang lo told Mtsho mo's parents he would kill her and her lover if Mtsho mo divorces him and destroys his family's reputation. They also worry about Mtsho mo's reputation and think no one will marry her if she divorces," said Rdo rje.

The little boy thought, "Sister Mtsho mo should not worry about her reputation. She can have a happy life with her lovely son. If I were Sister Mtsho mo, I would play with my son and not think about unhappy things."

"Mtsho mo just committed suicide. She hung herself with a herding sling in her small tent, pitched next to her family's tent," the father's brother announced, entering the tent, interrupting their conversation.

"Oh no! How miserable!" said Rdo rje.

The little boy wanted to pee and peaked through a small hole in his family's tent door. He stepped back and called, "Mother, it's dark outside. There's probably a ghost. I'm scared."

# 12

## MTSHO MO'S DREAM

### Characters

Dbyangs can


Mtsho mo

Tshe skyid

a famous local singer

Tshe skyid's daughter

Mtsho mo's mother

tsho mo stood motionlessly at the gate of a yak enclosure, her back to the enclosure's yak-dung wall. She gazed again and again at her favorite orphan calf and then upward, to the shimmering stars. Her red cheeks grew ever redder from the frigid winter's sharp wind. She pressed her robe sleeve to her cracked lips and then inspected the blood on the sleeve. She pondered while staring at one particular, glittering star and realized that she had lost her dream for years and years.

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The limitless grassland was vigorous and calm after a slight rain. Colorful rainbows decorated spectacular mountains that reared above winding rivers. Butterflies flaunted their beauty, flitting over and among nameless sweet-smelling flowers whose fragrance delighted every living creature. Mtsho mo plucked a flower and sniffed it. A big smile covered her fifteen-year-old face. As a melodious herding song echoed from far away, she grew emotionally intoxicated. Mounted on the back of a placid black horse a red-scarfed herder sang, stimulating Mtsho mo's latent musical talents. She nervously tried to imitate the melody.

In the early evening, she quietly repeated an incomplete version of the song in the shadow of a shrub. Out of nowhere, a mellow breeze rustled green, lush leaves. A leaf brushed against Mtsho mo's right cheek. Cool and comfortable, she slowly closed her eyes, savoring the experience.

A song rose once more from the grassland. Mtsho mo sleepily rubbed her eyes, yawned, stretched out her legs, and listened intently. After a while, the song subsided. Breathing quickly, she quietly stood up, put her right hand to her forehead, and gazed at the singer, who was crossing a high mountain peak, her red scarf fluttering vibrantly in the wind. The singer soon vanished, so Mtsho mo drove her yaks back home.

The next morning, Mtsho mo stood next to her mother, Tshe skyid, who was milking a white yak while chanting scriptures. Tshe skyid was curious why Mtsho mo was so concentrated, and thought, "Maybe she's meditating."

Mtsho mo quietly sang again. Tshe skyid recognized the lyrics and realized Mtsho mo was singing a familiar herding song. Not wanting their

neighbors to hear, Tshe skyid glared at Mtsho mo who stuck out her tongue and lowered her head. Tshe skyid was determined to scold her, but no words came out of her wide-open mouth.

Mtsho mo recalled her grandmother telling her it was improper for a singer to sing near their home because the singer would be reborn in the realm of greatest suffering after death. Her grandmother compared singing to tormented howling and grieving. Mtsho mo dared not look at her mother's disapproving face and kept her head down as her mother angrily scolded, "Shameless! How dare you sing near our home! Neighbors, relatives, and your brothers will hear you! Foolish girl! Don't you know it's disgraceful to sing near your home and our neighbors?"

Mtsho mo stuck out her tongue again as tears trickled down her face and splattered on the ground. Mtsho mo wondered why women sang *ma Ni* melodies and milking songs near their home.

"You want to marry a man whose family is far from your parents' home? You don't care about destroying your reputation?" her mother demanded.

Mtsho mo's grandmother had told a story about one of her herding-mates who was very beautiful and often sang near her home, defying her parents' objections. Her parents worried about her reputation and urged her to at least sing in the mountains. However, she loved to sing, and nothing changed. Unfortunately, she could not marry her lover, a very handsome young man from her community. Though they had secretly gone to the local monastery and vowed to marry each other, their dream never materialized.

The young beauty eventually wed a man who lived far from her home. She regretted ignoring her parents' advice.

Mtsho mo again stuck out her tongue and nodded her head a little, indicating she understood.

Mtsho mo was eager to learn new songs by participating in weddings. Locals enjoyed songs at wedding parties and praised Dbyangs can, a famous local singer who often sang when she herded yaks high in the mountains. Her sharp, clear voice attracted many herdsmen.





Once, Mtsho mo was disappointed because Dbyangs can did not sing at a wedding. After the event, Mtsho mo rushed over, and respectfully asked, "Why didn't you sing today?"

A big smile blossomed on Dbyangs can's beautiful face as she looked at her brother, Tshe po, who was clad in a cassock and sitting cross-legged at the head of a row. She responded, "My oldest brother joined the wedding, so I dared not sing."

Mtsho mo nodded, understanding that it was unthinkable for women to sing near their brothers, male cousins, and monks.

Three years later, Mtsho mo told her grandmother that she was in love with a handsome local man, wanted to marry him, and lead a happy life.

Mtsho mo's grandmother affectionately stroked her head and said, "I came from far away to marry your grandfather. You are young and don't understand many things. Local people said I left my home place and married my husband, whose family was a long way from mine because I sang a lot when I was young."

Mtsho mo silently stared at her grandmother. Afterward, she decided that she would not sing until she married her current lover. She regretted that she had sung as her grandmother had and prayed that she would be able to marry her current lover.

That particular star still shimmered in a darkening sky as Mtsho mo withdrew from her tumbled thoughts. Tears streaked down her cheeks and quickly cooled, refreshing her. Just at that moment out of nowhere, an arrow of cold wind pierced Mtsho mo's heart. Reluctantly, she headed home.

# 13

## PAIN

### Characters

Bkra shis

Don 'grub

Gangs lha

Mtsho mo

Rdo rje

Skyid 'dzoms

Skyid mtsho

Rdo rje's maternal uncle

Mtsho mo's brother's son


a rich woman

Rdo rje's mother

Mtsho mo's son

a childless woman

a poor woman

orning. Herders sang on horseback while driving their livestock to the mountains, enjoying the view of a glorious mountain ridge rearing into the blue sky. Thick white clouds decorated the holy mountain's peak. Many creeks flowed lyrically in every direction at the foot of the sacred mountain. Various birds chirped on vigorously growing tree branches, as butterflies lazily circled among aromatic, colorful summer blossoms. The small G.yang ru Tribe was camped at the bottom of the sacred, dignified mountain. Men from other tribes regularly offered incense to this mountain deity.

Every morning, G.yang ru Tribe women and girls got up early and milked yaks while singing milking tunes. This attracted many strong, handsome men who had come to offer incense to the mountain deity.

Locals believed that no tribe would invade and steal yaks from the G.yang ru Tribe because the mountain deity regarded the tribe as a family member and protected it. The G.yang ru Tribe was the most peaceful and happiest of all the tribes in Sngon lung County.



When it came time to move from the summer pasture to the winter pasture, Mtsho mo hurriedly packed her family belongings into sacks and yak-skin bags. With the cuff of her right sleeve, she wiped the dirt and sweat from her weathered face.

Her yak-hair tent was the smallest among the tribe's households, but it seemed a perfect fit for her family. Though it was faded and full of patches, she preferred it. Three generations of her family had lived in it, and she never desired a new or bigger one. This tent was very precious to her and provided ample space for her few bags.

After packing up everything except for her wooden bucket, which she would attach to a yak pack frame, she rushed outside and called to her brother's son, Don 'grub, who was busy untying his family's livestock, preparing to move to the winter pasture.

He ignored her. Anger flared in her heart. "Fool! Is he deaf? People

are only polite to the rich and powerful!" she scolded.

Three of her brother's family members were nearby, and they also ignored her. Mtsho mo was extremely upset by this. She was also curious why her nephew ignored her, especially since he was the only person who sincerely cared about Mtsho mo and her family. Don 'grub was the most compassionate and sociable person in the tribe. His dream was to become a monk and live a peaceful, tranquil life.

After she had shouted more than ten times, hoping to hear good news from Don 'grub, she instead heard that her oldest son, Rdo rje, would not return home as soon as she wished.

Despondently entering her tent, she sat on a pack near the tent entrance, looked outside despairingly, and noticed a calf that was still tied. She put her palms together, held them near her forehead, and piously prayed, "Oh my Buddha! Every living being is so appropriately piteous. How could I leave this calf tied till noon? How cruel and forgetful I have been."

She picked up her wooden pail and walked to the calf's mother. She did not need to hobble this yak's front legs as was necessary for the other mother yaks. She untied the famished calf, which eagerly ran to its mother and nursed, rhythmically butting the udder. Meanwhile, Mtsho mo's mind was full of thoughts about her oldest son's gambling addiction. He had taken ten of her yaks the previous year to partially pay off his debts.

When the calf's mouth was full of milk bubbles, she gently took her muddy, milk-covered right hand and tugged the rope around the calf's neck with her left hand. It was not easy to pull a calf from its mother. The calf jerked back, upsetting her. Her tenderness evaporating, she roughly twisted the calf's tail, pulled the hair on its back, and tied it to a tether that the other calves were tied to, keeping them away from the mother yaks.

Taking a deep breath, she lamented, "Poor little calf! I'm your only helper when ruthless wolves attack you, but how stoutly you resist me!" and kicked the calf's belly with all her strength.

She walked around the calf, breathing hard. Standing near the mother yak, she put her hands on its back and pondered, recalling how her third husband had beaten her oldest son badly after he had defied him. As she recalled her past life and especially her failed marriages, she

automatically wiped away tears, refusing to wallow in painful reminiscences.

All the tribal households had moved to the winter pasture, except for Mtsho mo's family and Skyid 'dzoms, a single, childless woman in her fifties. Mtsho mo drove her twenty yaks to a small hill near her home and then went to visit Skyid 'dzoms.

Meanwhile, Mtsho mo's riding yak stood motionless near her tent, like a watchdog protecting the family. Mtsho mo rode this gentle yak when she drove the yaks back to the yak enclosure from the mountains and hills. She had developed pain in her knees two years earlier, which made having a mount important.

One day Mtsho mo had ridden the yak to consult a local traditional doctor, who suggested that she lose weight and see a physician who practiced modern medicine. She did not tell Rdor rje what the doctor had said, thinking that the medical treatment would be expensive and no one would be willing to accompany her to a hospital in an urban area.

She now focused on finding money to pay high school fees for her youngest son, Tshe ring. She hoped he would have a happy, satisfying life in school, just like the children of rich families. Each time she got some money from selling a yak or wild herbs she had collected, she sent most of it to Tshe ring without her oldest son's knowledge.

Skyid 'dzoms warmly welcomed her into her small tent, full of the odor of *rtsam pa*. They had a simple breakfast. "Do you want more *rtsam pa*?" offered Skyid 'dzoms.

"No thanks, but I'll have another steamed bun with a bowl of milk tea," hungry Mtsho mo replied.

"Have as much as you like, but there are few steamed buns. Probably you won't be full. Meat soup with steamed bread is wonderful. My grandmother often cooked meat soup and steamed bread for me. It's extremely delicious and my favorite meal. Unfortunately, I haven't had meat for a long time. It's almost been a year since you gave me a calf's front leg. You know how it is, no husband, no meat. No one likes to sin by killing yaks for someone else," Skyid 'dzoms confided.

Mtsho mo understood her friend. "I'll be full, so don't worry. I also really like both *rtsam pa* and bread with meat soup. My grandmother also cooked meat soup for me," she said quietly and bowed her head, tears moistening her cheeks.

Skyid 'dzoms felt sorry for her and comforted, "Don't cry. Everyone makes mistakes. Only holy *bla ma* are perfect."

Mtsho mo sat quietly for a long time before sobbing, "I didn't make a mistake just once. I chose my husbands and left my mother three times. I never imagined they would leave me when I left Mother."

Skyid 'dzoms knew Mtsho mo would talk about her cruel husbands and how they had tortured her and her sons. She often talked about this when they met. She said, "You are so lucky to have two sons, unlike me. It's really difficult to live as a single woman. I yearn to live with a man."

Mtsho mo moved near Skyid 'dzoms and said, "Don't easily trust a man. No man understands our feelings and our miserable situation. Men only want to use our bodies. I'm sorry for my two fatherless sons."

Skyid 'dzoms nodded in agreement and said, "Yes! You are so right, but we need a husband to prevent cruel youngsters from bullying us. Last night, I had a night visitor. He told me about your lover, a man your age who visits you at night. You're young enough. Why don't you marry again? I want to marry, but no man will marry me because they think I'm poor and too old, although they will visit me at night."

A smile played on Mtsho mo's face as she sipped milk tea, and then asked, "But, how can I avoid rumors?"

Adding some dry yak dung to the stove Skyid 'dzoms continued, "Ignore what others say. What matters is having a man who'll take your burdens and put them on his shoulders."

This conversation made Mtsho mo recall her fourth marriage, but then she noticed her riding yak tied near her tent. She rushed over and untied it, feeling sorry that the yak had been unable to graze or drink the whole day. The day before she had ridden it to drive the other yaks back home. She had fallen off as it quickly descended the mountain. She now felt doubly guilty.

One of Mtsho mo's herding-mates had told her a story he had heard from a *bla ma* about a man who treated his horse very badly. The local *bla ma* met the horse's master and urged him to repent, but he refused and had died from a painful illness a few days later.

She consoled herself that she had saved the yak's life when her oldest son had wanted to sell it. She now vowed never again to be unkind to her yak and murmured a mantra repetitively.

The following morning, Rdo rje got up early, packed, and readied two



yaks. His mother was still angry that he had returned home a day late. She worried that the tribe leader would punish her family and scold her for not moving on time to the winter pasture, a violation of tribal rules. Ignoring her, Rdo rje got ready to drive the livestock and grabbed the watchdog's chain to prevent the dog from attacking a passerby. The dog pulled back and angrily glared at him. Rdo rje knew his mother was kind to the mastiff. He had suggested many times that they not feed the dog but instead, let him find food for himself. His mother disagreed and gave it *rtsam pa* soup and leftovers twice a day.

Every time Rdo rje came home, his mother told him to go to the township town and mill barley. He knew why his family's *rtsam pa* supply finished so quickly, but he never complained.

Mtsho mo wanted Rdo rje to marry and care for the family. Despite feeling embarrassed, Mtsho mo had raised the matter of marriage with Rdo rje. She hated it when Rdo rje wandered here and there and sold her yaks to pay off his debts. She also made sure that her brother, Bkra shis, would not give Rdo rje money to satisfy his creditors.

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A wooden cabin sat in a deep, narrow valley, where no one lived, except for Mtsho mo's family. Both sides of the valley were so high that it was impossible to enjoy the sunrise. Thick, dense trees covered one valley mountain. Anyone hearing the harsh wail of the wind blowing through the trees felt cold and forlorn.

Mtsho mo and Rdo rje set off with their yaks for the winter pasture. In the evening, they reached the cabin painted with red earth and yak dung.

They soon had all their belongings in the cabin that had only one room with two windows. The cabin reeked of mice and decay.

Mtsho mo made a fire in the adobe stove. There was no water, so Rdo rje took a bucket and walked to the door. Mtsho mo said, "You are twenty and old enough to marry."

Rdo rje paused, pretended not to hear, and walked to a nearby spring. As he scooped water into his bucket, he recalled a story a friend had told him about a virgin boy, Tshe don, who had visited a girl:

Romantically inexperienced, he had not given even so much as a little kiss to the

girl and had soon left. Later, the girl told others about this encounter. Much unkind gossip soon circulated in the local community. The boy's friends and peers joked and laughed at him. One day not long after these hurtful rumors began spreading, he drove his family's yaks to a high mountain and returned home for breakfast. After dismounting, he met his mother in his family's house yard. She carried a metal basin full of ash, which, to make things worse, she flung in front of him.

The whole day he felt uncomfortable about this, recalling his grandmother saying, "*Nangs snga mo'i thal ba gyong, dgong phyi dro'i thal ba grog* 'Good luck comes when you encounter someone discarded ash in the evening, bad luck comes when this happens in the morning'."

Unable to bear this, Tshe don left his community and became a monk in a monastery far from his home.

Rdo rje worried that his mother would disapprove if he married Gangs lha, the only girl he visited at night. They loved each other. Gangs lha's family was wealthy, and his mother often talked about how rich, powerful people disdained the weak and poor.

He vividly recalled his maternal uncle, Bkra shis, visiting after his mother had left her second husband. His uncle had looked at him and admonished, "Never marry a girl from a rich family, even if she loves you and is kind to you. Her family will torment you, hold you in contempt, and will treat you as a hired herder. They will never treat you like a real family member, even if you live with them for many years."

Rdo rje, however, was addicted to gambling. Having many debts, he had decided against marrying Skyid mtsho, the daughter of a poor family, though they had grown up together and had been in love as children. Once, when they were herding calves near a creek, he had said, "I will marry you when I'm old enough. Don't marry anyone else, or I'll become a monk."

He felt guilty recalling this, especially when he heard that Skyid mtsho continued to love him and was waiting for him to bring her to his home. He knew he had few choices. The only thing he could do was to marry a rich family's daughter and pay off his debts, ignoring his mother and uncle's advice.

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Two years passed. Rdo rje and Gangs lha married and divorced.

One chilly morning Rdo rje was busily doing chores while also caring for his daughter, who Gangs lha had left in his home after the divorce.

Mtsho mo was not sure that she should milk a weak calf's mother, worrying the calf would die if she did not let it nurse all its mother's milk, but there was no alternative. It was the only source of milk for her granddaughter. She murmured complaints that Rdo rje had married Gangs lha, but then a smile appeared on her ruddy cheeks. She recalled that Tshe ring had promised to buy her a pair of cheap fabric shoes when he returned home from his high school during the winter holiday.

...

Tshe ring sat near the stove and talked to his mother and brother about his happy time at school. He looked at the floor when Rdo rje asked if the other students were kind to him. He never talked about his real relationships with others to his brother and mother. He did not want to worry them about how badly he was treated because his family was poor.

Tshe ring sincerely did not want to trouble his family. He understood his family's situation was unlike that of rich families. He had to talk to them, however, because he needed their financial support to study at university, which he hoped to begin the next year.

His mother was astonished when Rdo rje said, "We could sell your riding yak to support Tshe ring's university study."

While she hoped that her son would have a bright future and a happy life, she refused to sell her beloved riding yak to generate cash for his study expenses.

The next morning Tshe ring got up early and without having breakfast, drove his family's yaks into the narrow valley while the rest of his family slumbered.

# 14

## REVENGE

### Characters

Bkra don

Grags pa

Lha mo

Mtsho mo

Tshe don

Tshe po

Zla ba

Grags pa's brother

Lha mo's husband


Grags pa's wife

Zla ba's mother

Zla ba's father

Zla ba's friend

Tshe don's son

 Zla ba couldn't sleep. How exciting to visit his father's friend the next day! He was sure the journey would be the most exciting time yet in his short life. He began chanting scriptures, which was, according to his grandmother, the best way to go to sleep.

Zla ba got up early the next morning. As he pulled on his sheepskin robe, he realized it was stained with dried blood. He put on his sister's extra sheepskin robe while she was still in bed and hurriedly had a bowl of *rtsam pa* for breakfast. His father stretched and yawned, slowly pulled on his sheepskin, and went out of the tent, without wearing a sash.

His mother, Mtsho mo, took a kettle from the adobe stove, poured hot water in a red plastic basin, and then scooped cold water from a big metal pot and added it to the basin.

Tshe don groggily entered the tent, washed his face and hands, and calmly sat crossed-legged near the stove. Zla ba burst in, concerned his sister would wake up, knowing she would scold him for wearing her sheepskin. He stared at his father, who was gloomily having breakfast. He hoped his father would finish soon and tried to say something, but his father ignored him, not noticing his panic.

...

It was a chilly winter day, and Zla ba could no longer hold his reins. He wiped the snot from his nose as his docile horse followed his father's horse. This was tough work because he had to do it constantly. Tshe don did not give so much as a backward glance, insensitive to his discomfort.

They finally reached their destination in the late evening. Grags pa greeted them warmly, and asked his wife, Lha mo, to cook noodles. They had not met since Grags pa had moved near an army campsite. Grags pa's brother was a government clerk and had a good relationship with soldiers, who were kind to Grags pa and gave him bags of flour and rice, cooking oil, and spices. He had decided to stay.

Grags pa and Tshe don enjoyed chatting about this and that. Zla ba silently sat near the stove and said nothing, even when Lha mo asked him to have more tea. When Lha mo finished cooking, she offered noodles in dragon-decorated bowls. Zla ba was startled by such beautiful bowls. Firstly, Zla ba bashfully sipped the soup of noodles. Wow! It was the most

delicious food he had ever tasted. Unable to control himself, he had three bowls of noodles, not noticing his father's face becoming redder and redder.

On the way home, Zla ba said, "Father, you said we would spend the night at Grags pa's home."



Tshe don did not respond. When they reached a flat grassland, they dismounted and let the horses graze the brown, dry grass. Zla ba needed to defecate, untied his sash, pulled his sheepskin up, and squatted. His father then attacked him like a ferocious wolf savaging a lamb. While beating him, he said, "Shameless, nitwit! What happened to you? How shameful to ask for more noodles! I'll never take you to visit a family again. Shameless turd!"

They silently rode back home.

After some days, Grags pa and his brother, Bkra don, came to visit Tshe don. A fire raged in the depths of Zla ba's heart. He wanted revenge

for his father beating him. He decided to make his father angry and ashamed so went to see his friend, Tshe po, the local bad boy and said, "Tonight, we can ride beautiful horses. My family has visitors whose strong horses are energetic. I'm eager to ride Bkra don's black horse. Bkra don gets a lot of attention from many beautiful women when he rides his energetic horse and has a rifle on his back."

His friend agreed and decided to spend the night in Zla ba's tent.


They snuck out of the tent after other family members and the visitors slept and rushed to where the visitors' horses were tied. They argued for a while, both eager to ride the beautiful black horse. Tshe po was a tough boy, and sometimes Zla ba was scared of him, so Tshe po rode the black horse, and Zla ba rode the mare. They galloped here and there, laughing in excitement until the horses were so exhausted they could no longer trot. Then they tied the horses back where they had found them.

The next morning, Tshe don was shamed to see their guests' exhausted horses with salt marks on their bellies and leg joints.

Zla ba smiled when he saw the humiliation on his father's face.

# 15

## SKIN, BLOOD, EVIL

 One sunny, pleasant summer day, the local leader's son was on a date with one of the local *bla ma*'s nieces. Elders believed their destinies doomed their marriage. However, the *bla ma* divined and was pleased with the results. The boy's parents were very religious and accepted what those in high-ranking religious positions said. Younger community members agreed that both the boy and girl were good-looking and loved each other.

After three years of marriage, locals' idea about their marriage changed.

One day, the wife was on her way to fetch water near her home. Suddenly, she stopped, turned, and noticed three children playing by her neighbor's tent. A girl clad in red clothes left the other children and ran toward her home, crying and constantly glancing at the other children. The wife imagined that if she were the child's mother, she would scoop the little girl up in her arms and hold her until she stopped crying.

The wife squatted at the water source, ladling water into a wooden bucket but then paused, staring into the shallow creek. There were no fish. A breeze rippled the water surface, refreshing her. She blinked her beautiful eyes. After the breeze stopped, she saw her reflection in the water. She registered her beauty and a scar on her right cheek that had a history. One night her husband had been enraged when she handed him a bowl of milk tea with her left hand. A woman offering something to others with her left hand is impolite and considered ominous. Interpreting this as disrespect, her husband grabbed the stick used to rake fire from the adobe stove and struck his wife's face.

She touched the scar several times and resumed filling the bucket. She squatted, put the full bucket on her back and tried to stand, but failed in two attempts. As she waited for another woman to fetch water and help



her, she gazed again into the water. When she saw the scar, she did not hate her husband. Instead, she thought she was lucky to have married him.

...

The husband was hunting with his fellows on lofty, thickly forested mountains one chilly winter day. The men boasted about how many women they had slept with and generally had a joyful time together, though they killed no game other than a deer. Later the same day, the husband skinned the deer near his family's tent. When his wife finished tying their yaks, she came to help her husband, who was chopping the carcass into pieces and dividing them among his hunting mates. He told his wife to put the portions in bags. Suddenly, he stuck his tongue out, and his face turned red. He wanted to say something to his wife, but nothing emerged from his mouth.

That night, the husband felt cold and could not sleep. The wind whistled outside as the watchdogs howled. His best friend had said, "Your wife can't become pregnant because she is probably a bad woman," not daring to say she was evil, although some locals said so. The husband had no evidence to suggest his wife was evil. She loved him and was very kind to his parents. He stopped pondering, kissed his wife, and sank into a deep slumber.

Several months passed. It was summer, a time when women were busy milking the yaks and churning. The couple was concerned that their family's dairy products were less than usual. For the yaks to give more milk, the husband got up early every day and took the yaks to high mountains to graze on the lush grass that grew there. His wife reported that during the first summer month, she had milked three buckets of milk every morning, but now in the second summer month, she could only get two buckets of milk.

The husband talked to a herding-mate who said, "Once a wife skinned a wild animal killed by her husband. Afterward, her family's dairy products decreased. Later, the family head consulted a *bla ma* who divined and said, 'Probably your daughter skinned an animal someone had hunted.' The husband expelled his wife from their tent and remarried. The family's dairy products then increased."

The husband said nothing. Recalling that the local *bla ma* was his wife's uncle, he decided against consulting him.

Finally, as autumn snow dusted the high mountain peaks, the husband said to his father, "One day, when you left home to visit the local *bla ma*, my wife helped me skin a deer."

His father angrily said, "Evil! No children! Few dairy products."

The husband immediately regretted what he had said, but it was too late. The wheels had already started turning.

# 16

## STUBBORN SISTER

### Characters

Bkra shis

Dung mtsho

Rdo rje

Zla ba

Dung mtsho's brother

Bkra shis' sister

a hunter

Dung mtsho's son

**B**kra shis disappointedly gave up persuading his sister, Dung mtsho. He left her tent and walked to his family's tent. He worried about Dung mtsho moving to the winter pasture alone, providing bandits the opportunity to steal her livestock. The year before, he had faced a great challenge in dealing with thieves who stole yaks from one of his neighbors.

Bkra shis entered his family tent, but then decided to advise his sister again so walked back to her tent.

Zla ba held a yak-hair cloth bag in front of his mother. He was ten-years-old and shorter and smaller than the bag. He stared at Dung mtsho as she folded some sheepskin robes, held them, and moved from the tent's right side to the left where Zla ba was holding the bag. As she moved about, the hem of her sheepskin robe brushed the ground, stirring up little whirligigs of dust. Filling the bag with the robes, she tied the bag tightly with a yak-hair rope and rushed over to the left side of the tent to put pots and kettles in a yak-skin bag. She ignored Bkra shis, who had just re-entered the tent and sat cross-legged on the right side of the tent.

Bkra shis hesitated, thinking, "Should I persuade her again not to move now?"

Dung mtsho gazed at him wrathfully. Bkra shis swallowed, stood up, and paced inside the tent. He spoke to Zla ba, who looked at his mother's angry face and said nothing. Bkra shis left the tent in exasperation.

A butter lamp-light illuminated the tent as Zla ba and his mother were having supper. After a bowl of *rtsam pa*, Zla ba went to bed without speaking. He lay on a yak-hair mat on the right side of the tent, his head on the folded sheepskin robe he used for a pillow. Unable to sleep, he worried about moving to the winter pasture the next day. He thought, "Uncle Bkra shis is experienced so Mother should listen to him." He also worried that his mother would beat him if he disobeyed her. Scared of ruthless bandits who might kill people, he prayed to Buddha and chanted scriptures.

On this snowy morning, Zla ba held a nose-ring rope and tried to keep the yak calm as his mother tied bags to the pack frame on its back. Anger burned in her heart as she cursed her brother for not coming to help pack the yaks. The yak seemed docile, so Zla ba put his freezing fingers into his mouth to warm them.

The yak suddenly moved forward, stepping on Dung mtsho's foot. Unable to bear the pain, she rushed into the tent. After a while, she came out holding a yak-leather rope. Zla ba panicked, and tears trickled from his little round eyes when he saw the rope, imagining his mother would whip him.

Dung mtsho mounted a white horse, ready to drive her family's livestock to the winter pasture. Zla ba reluctantly rode a calm black, polled yak. His family's red, watchdog followed. Zla ba observed his playmates chasing one another, throwing snowballs. He looked back at them, felt lonesome as his mates disappeared behind him, and sobbed quietly.

Dung mtsho was proud of how she was heroically moving to the winter pasture and felt she was clever and compassionate when she saw her family's fifteen yaks grazing near a creek. She was sure that her family's yaks would soon fatten, providing her family with fat meat for winter. She was curious why her son, sitting quietly on the right side of the tent, seemed so unhappy and worried, "Will he be a coward like Bkra shis?"

The next morning, Zla ba woke up, stretched, and yawned. Busy with rubbing his eyes, he noticed his mother's ashen face. He put his head under the cover, deliberately avoiding her. Realizing what had probably happened, he knew he could do nothing.

Dung mtsho searched everywhere for her family's livestock. To her amazement, the thieves had even stolen the family's old sacred yak. She scolded herself, regretting her rash decision.

Zla ba got up later, made lunch, and waited for Dung mtsho's return. He took the kettle from the adobe stove, placed it on the ground, and impatiently rushed out of the tent to see if his mother was coming. When he eventually saw her in the far distance, he entered the tent and heated the tea.

Dung mtsho only had two bowls of tea. Zla ba was sure she had not found any of their livestock. Zla ba felt sleepy after eating two bowls of *rtsam pa* and lay down for a nap, his snores disturbing Dung mtsho's tangled ruminations.

Three days later, other neighbors arrived, and their livestock scattered everywhere, creating a new world. Dogs barked at colts running near the creek. Dung mtsho was embarrassed to see Bkra shis in the late evening.

While his wife went to bring the family's yaks back home, Bkra shis stayed at home, caring for their three-year-old son. Dung mtsho put her head down, unconsciously scratching it with her right hand. Sometimes she glanced at Bkra shis, trying to say something, but gave up and stuck out her tongue. Bkra shis respectfully offered her a dragon-decorated bowl of tea, which Dung mtsho sipped and felt better. Smiling broadly, she said, "Dear brother, I am so bad! Our family's yaks are gone. Stolen!"

Bkra shis did not directly respond. He felt sorry for her and especially pitied Zla ba.



Time passed. There was no news of the missing yaks. Zla ba visited his neighbors and did not spend much time with his mother. Sometimes he did not return home at night. As time passed, some families did not welcome Zla ba, so his hungry stomach rumbled the whole day.

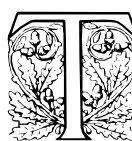
One day, he visited Rdo rje, a hunter in his sixties, who realized Zla ba was a brave, honest boy and was happy to enlist him as his assistant.

Meanwhile, Zla ba understood that Rdo rje was a hunter with years of experience, and by helping him, he could get fresh meat.

...

Darkness came, and it was hard to see far into the distance. Zla ba put the hind leg of a deer on his shoulder, ignoring the blood soaking into his sheepskin robe. He was eager to see his mother and tried to move quickly, but the big piece of meat was too heavy for that.

## THE LUCKY LEADER AND HIS SON

he leader had been lucky. When he was twenty, he was the only person who could read and write Tibetan in his community, which explains why he became the local leader, a position he occupied for years.

He had two cars. One was an old car he had bought five years after he started his government job. The other was an expensive vehicle he had recently purchased and valued more than any of his other possessions. When he drove it, he worried accidents might occur.

The leader had only one child, a son, whom he dearly loved. The mother encouraged her son to enroll in school, but he resisted because his playmates did not attend school that year. As his mother's insisted, the boy cried for a whole evening and fell ill.

His grandmother worried and scolded the boy's mother with, "School is a prison! I don't want my grandson to suffer there. Students escape from school because they starve and teachers beat them like prisoners."

She knew that her son, the local leader, would not dare to overrule her. Meanwhile, the father thought he could arrange a job for his son when he grew up, thanks to his position.

The years passed. Most of the boy's peers attended school. He had no playmates except during school holidays, so he often played with his grandmother. Initially, he enjoyed being with her. When they tired, they rested near the family tent. The boy sat on his grandmother's lap and listened to her stories. Sometimes he nursed her, though her breasts were dry.

One evening, the grandmother piously chanted scriptures in front of some deity images. The boy worshipped next to his grandmother but



soon grew bored. He impatiently waited for an hour, but she still chanted and worshipped devoutly. The boy picked up his grandmother's wooden cane and knocked her head with it. The grandmother finished chanting and angrily scolded, "*Dre phrug* 'Son of a ghost!'" and slapped him.

From that day on, the boy spent less time playing with his grandmother and increasingly missed his playmates. No longer satisfied with his grandmother, he yearned to attend school, especially after one of his peers told him that he could drive a fancy car and become a government clerk after he finished school. Wanting to be a leader like his father and own an expensive car, the boy implored his father to let him attend school. His father finally agreed, but added, "Don't tell your grandmother!"

Three months later, the boy's best friend returned home from school. They played together the whole day, and the boy confided that he would attend school the next year. The boy's friend was ecstatic at the thought of being in school together. The boys jumped and leaped into the air. The grandmother was delighted to see her grandson so happy, kissed his forehead, and gently stroked his head with her gnarled, unsteady hands.

Unable to control himself, the boy revealed what his father had promised. Shocked, the grandmother glared at her son, then gazed at her lovely grandson as tears trickled down her cheeks. Finally, she scolded, "You're not a good father. You don't love your son. You want him to suffer in school. You are not my son if you send him to school!"

The father urged his mother many times to permit the boy to attend school, but she would not relent.

The father could thus not keep the promise he had made to his son, but assured, "If you don't attend school, I'll ensure you take my position when you are older."

Thinking he could drive a fancy car if he became a leader, the boy eventually agreed.

Twenty years passed. The son was now twenty-eight, and his father had just retired. Unfortunately, the county leaders chose another local leader. This could not be changed. The decision was obvious because the son was illiterate.

The son angrily wanted to complain but dared not. His father was mourning the death of his mother, who had passed away some months earlier.



# 18

## THE SHEPHERD

### Characters

Tshe don

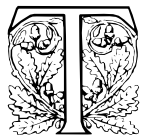
Tshe ring

Tshe skyid

Tshe ring's uncle

Tshe skyid's grandson

Tshe ring's grandmother



she ring was an impoverished, nine-year-old boy. A year earlier, he had lost his mother and was now cared for by his grandmother, Tshe skyid. She was strict, very religious, and enjoyed sitting in the sun and recounting stories of legendary saints to Tshe ring. She was sure this would accumulate merit, and she imagined that her grandson might become a holy person if her stories of the saints influenced him.

Tshe ring seldom played with his fellows, preferring to listen to Tshe skyid's glorious stories. His best friend was his grandmother until he began helping his uncle, Tshe don, a devoted shepherd.

The grandmother was proud of Tshe ring. Locals praised his honest, sincere personality. Tshe don often asked Tshe ring to help him tend his sheep. Tshe ring dreamed of becoming a wealthy shepherd.

During a blizzard, many livestock starved to death. Uncle Tshe don was so concerned about his sheep that he couldn't sleep at night. Unable to bear the sheep dying from starvation, he decided to drive them to where there was more forage. While preparing to move, he told Tshe ring to accompany him. Initially, reluctant to lose the chance of enjoying his grandmother's stories, he finally agreed.

When they reached the summer pasture in the late evening, the wind was blowing snow everywhere. Tshe ring put his hand over his mouth and stared at Uncle Tshe don, who was desperately pitching a small, black yak-hair tent, which the whistling wind pulled down more than once. Tshe ring's limbs were numb by the time his uncle finally got a fire going inside their metal stove. After a simple meal of tea and dry fried bread, they went to bed.

Tshe ring missed his grandmother. Uncle Tshe don's gloomy face and quiet personality depressed him. He felt even worse when he heard wolves howling, imagining lambs losing their mothers. Bleating lambs caught his sympathy, and he wanted to wake his uncle and help the lambs locate their mothers, but Uncle Tshe don was snoring loudly, so he dared not disturb him. He begged Buddha to have mercy on the lambs and wiped his tears away while recalling his tragic past.

The next morning, Uncle Tshe don got up earlier than usual, made a fire in the stove, and boiled tea. Tshe ring pulled on his sheepskin robe and went out to pee. He was astonished to see something moving in a

yak-hair bag near the tent. Thinking the bag had been full of yak dung for making a fire, he glanced at his uncle, who was busily catching some weak lambs. Tshe ring realized that lambs were bleating in the bag. Curious as to why Uncle Tshe don was putting living lambs in a bag, he asked, "Dear Uncle, why are you putting the lambs in the bag? Are they going to die?"

Uncle Tshe don did not reply for a bit and then said, "They all will die."

"It's a sin to kill them. Aren't you afraid of going to Hell after you die?" asked Tshe ring.

"Nobody wants to go to Hell. I can do nothing for them. They will all die soon. It's just a matter of time," his uncle said.

Tshe ring did not fully comprehend this, but he said no more.

They drove the sheep up a high mountain after breakfast. Tshe don asked Tshe ring to gather some branches and sweep the snow away from a place where they would sit. Tshe don held prayer beads in his right hand and piously chanted scriptures and mantras.

Tshe ring was eager to enjoy the amazing view of the snow-covered landscape, but the bright sunshine meant he could not see very far. He looked at Tshe don and wanted to chat, but did not, worrying he would sin if he disturbed his uncle's devout chanting. Curious to know how many lambs were in the flock, nibbling on dry grass below them, he stood on a big boulder and began counting. His math was poor, and every time he got a different number.

At noon, some ewes ran among the flock, searching for their lambs, bleating until they were hoarse. Tshe ring looked at them pitifully, stared at Uncle Tshe don, and asked, "Aren't the ewes pathetic?"

Uncle Tshe don slowly opened his eyes and responded, "If I don't kill the lambs, they will nurse their mothers, who are unable to eat much grass under this thick layer of snow. If the ewes nurse their lambs, they will weaken and die."

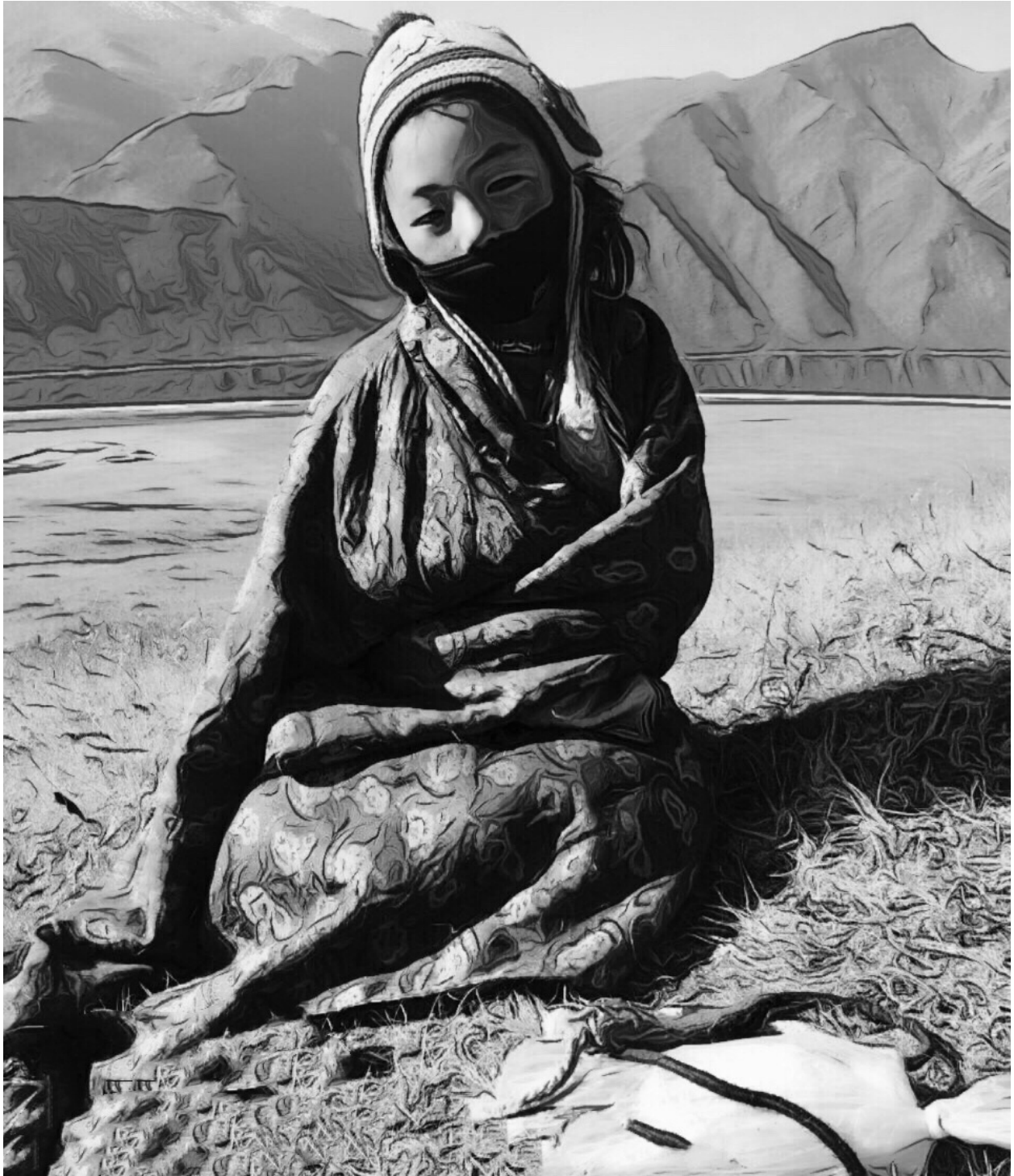
"Dear Uncle, we can feed the ewes some pieces of bread and *rtsam pa* if they become weak."

"Boy, it's not so easy. I just put ten lambs in the bag. You probably don't know that some rich families make a big yak-dung box and throw hundreds of lambs inside during blizzards."

Tshe ring stuck out his tongue and stared at his uncle, thinking the most sinful person in the world was a shepherd.

He now wondered if he should be a shepherd after learning that the richest people in his community owned many sheep.

A couple of months passed. Cuckoos chirped on vigorously growing branches. Tshe ring chased rainbows after a light morning shower. Lambs leaped across small streams and, when Tshe ring disturbed them, they rushed to their mothers.



Many shepherds came to the summer pasture with their sheep. Tshe ring was no longer lonely. The shepherds competed in horseraces on the vast grassland, chatted about lovers, and laughed loudly. Sometimes they continued until dawn.

Two months passed. Tshe ring did not imagine time could pass so

quickly. Deciding to herd their sheep elsewhere, they packed their yaks. Tshe ring was astonished when he saw the many sheep bones scattered around their campsite. As his eyes fixed on the shepherd's greasy faces, he realized just how sinful it was to become rich by herding.



# 19

## A DAY

### Characters

Sangs rgyas

Thang rnyed

Tshe kho

Tshe kho's biological father, Thang  
rnye's adoptive father

Sangs rgyas' adopted son

Sangs rgyas' biological son



cold, snowy winter morning is silent, but for barking watchdogs. Father Sangs rgyas sits, wearing his oily sheepskin robe without a sash, near the wood frame windows of his family's house. He stares at some cold, shivering sparrows searching for food. Father Sangs rgyas is in his forties. His poor eyesight doesn't let him see very far into the distance. Two birds share their food under some bushes. They don't like the weather, but they enjoy their lives. As Father Sangs rgyas observes the birds, he recalls his wife's death and looks away, his eyes brimming with grief.

Tshe kho is deeply asleep, snoring like a hog. Father Sangs rgyas wants to wake him, but he does not because the weather is very cold. Meanwhile, Thang rnyed takes a milk pail in his right hand and walks to the gate of the family's rectangular, adobe-wall courtyard. Snow covers his old, very worn sheepskin robe. He worries the snow will melt. The lower part of his sheepskin will then dry and be stiff, chaffing his ankles and calves until they bleed.

About a half-hour later, Thang rnyed makes a fire in their adobe stove and boils tea. He pours fresh milk into his father's red, wood bowl and hands his father a bowl with *rtsam pa*.

Tshe kho doesn't want to get up and asks Thang rnyed to give him breakfast. Tshe kho knows Thang rnyed is genuinely kind to him and his father.

Thang rnyed drives his family's yaks to the mountains after breakfast.

At lunchtime, Thang rnyed doesn't return. Father Sangs rgyas says to Tshe kho, "Don't eat now. Wait for Thang rnyed and have lunch together."

Tshe kho is upset, but says nothing, knowing his father has a bad heart. He doesn't understand why his father loves Thang rnyed so much and wonders why he doesn't tell Thang rnyed about their true relationship.

In the early evening, Father Sangs rgyas stays near the window, and rubs butter on Thang rnyed's sheepskin robe, softening it. Tshe kho decides his father doesn't love him very much and imagines marrying a girl and living in a community far away. Tshe kho unhappily goes outside. When he reenters the house, he sees Father Sangs rgyas rubbing butter on his sheepskin robe to make it soft and feels remorseful.

Thang rnyed drives the yaks into the yak enclosure and begins tethering the yaks. When Father Sangs rgyas tells Tshe kho to help Thang rnyed, Tshe kho asks, "Why should I help him? He's not my real brother. He's our family's servant."

Father Sangs rgyas sadly realizes that one day, Tshe kho will tell Thang rnyed about their true relationship.

After supper, Tshe kho sees his father's pale face and tired eyes. He knows his father's heart is very weak. Father Sangs rgyas asks his two sons to come near. He takes a thread with an agate from around his neck and holds it. It is his own father's agate. He hands it to Tshe kho. Next, he pulls the red, wood bowl from out of his robe pouch and puts it in Thang rnyed's hands.

Tshe kho's is angry. He wants the bowl, too. Father Sangs rgyas notices and says, "Tshe kho, after I die, please be kind to Thang rnyed. Love him as I love you, even though he is not your biological brother."

Father Sags rgyas surprises himself, immediately covers his mouth with his right palm and stares at Tshe kho with wide-open, unblinking eyes. Thang rnyed is astonished and tries to say something, but stops.

Tshe kho turns and smiles at Thang rnyed, who now understands he is adopted.

Father Sangs rgyas does not breathe.

The house is silent on this frigid winter night.

It begins to snow.



# NON-ENGLISH TERMS

## TIBETAN TERMS

'dre mo འདྲེ་མོ།  
'dre phrug འདྲེ་ཕུག།  
'jam lu འཇམ་ལུ།  
a mchod a lo ཨ་མཚོད་ཨ་ལོ།  
bkra don བརྒ་དོན།  
bkra g.yang བརྒ་གཡང་།  
bkra kho བརྒ་ཁོ།  
bkra shis བརྒ་ཤིས།  
bkra skyid བརྒ་སྐྱིད།  
bla ma བླ་མ།  
bzang lo བཟང་ལོ།  
dbang phyug དབང་ཕྱུག།  
dbyangs can དབྱངས་ཅན།  
de'u dkar དེ་ལུ་དཀར།  
dga' lung དག་ལ་ལུང་།  
do po དོ་པོ།  
don lo དོན་ལོ།  
don pe དོན་པེ།  
dpal 'dzoms དཔལ་འཛོམས།  
dpal bzang དཔལ་བཟང་།  
dpal ldan bkra shis དཔལ་ལྷན་བརྒ་ཤིས།  
dung mtsho དུང་མཚོ།  
g.yang mo གཡང་མོ།

g.yang ru གཡང་རུ།  
 gcig sgril གཅིག་སྒྲིལ།  
 grags pa གྲགས་པ།  
 gu ru phrin las ཀུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས།  
 lha 'dzoms ལྷ་འཛོམས།  
 lha mo ལྷ་མོ།  
 ma ne མ་ནེ།  
 ma Ni མ་ཎི།  
 mgo log མགོ་ལོག།  
 mtsho mo མཚོ་མོ།  
 mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན།  
 ngas khyod la slong ba yin, rkus pa min  
 ངས་ཁྱེད་ལ་སློང་བ་ཡིན། རུས་པ་མེན།  
 pad ma པད་མ།  
 pad mo པད་མོ།  
 rang nyid rang gi mgon yin རང་ཉིད་རང་གི་མགོན་ཡིན།  
 rdo rje རྡོ་རྗེ།  
 rdor lo རྡོར་ལོ།  
 rig grol རིག་གྲོལ།  
 rin chen mkhar རིན་ཆེན་མཁར།  
 rtsam pa རུས་པ།  
 sangs rgyas སངས་རྒྱས།  
 sangs rgyas bkra shis སངས་རྒྱས་བརྟ་ཤིས།  
 skal bzang nor bu སྐལ་བཟང་ནོར་བུ།  
 skyabs chen bde grol སྐབས་ཆེན་བདེ་གྲོལ།  
 skyid 'dzoms སྐྱིད་འཛོམས།  
 smin thang སྦྱིན་ཐང་།  
 sngon lung སྒོན་ལུང་།  
 sog ru སོག་རུ།  
 stobs stag lha སྟོབས་སྟག་ལྷ།  
 thang rnyed ཐང་རྟེན།

thar 'bum ཐར་འུམ།  
tshe brtan ཚེ་བརྟན།  
tshe bzang ཚེ་བཟང་།  
tshe don ཚེ་དོན།  
tshe kho ཚེ་ཁོ།  
tshe lo ཚེ་ལོ།  
tshe pe ཚེ་པེ།  
tshe dpal rdo rje ཚེ་དཔལ་རོ་རྗེ།  
tshe po ཚེ་པོ།  
tshe ring ཚེ་རིང་།  
tshe ring bkra shis ཚེ་རིང་བརྒྱ་ཤིས།  
tshe skyid ཚེ་སྐྱིད།  
zla ba ལྷ་བ།  
zla ba bstan 'dzin ལྷ་བ་བསྟན་འཛིན།

#### CHINESE TERMS

Banma 班玛  
Guoluo 果洛  
Jiuzhi 久治  
Mentang 门堂  
Qinghai 青海  
Sichuan 四川  
Suohurima 索呼日麻  
Xi'an 西安



